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Slam the Book: the role of performance in contemporary UK poetics.

Jack McGowan

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not previously been submitted for a degree at another institution.

Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between performance poetry and page-based poetry and the academic and non-specialist audience for performance poetry in the UK. Performance poetry in the UK is rapidly becoming a popular medium for experiencing poetry and I analyse the impact this has, and will have, in relation to the study of poetics, and the reading of poetry within the public sphere. I have identified three primary areas of research. First, I analyse the reception of performance poetry in the academy. Second, I assess the mechanisms of affect transmission in performance. Finally I interrogate the utilization of space through performance which contributes to the production of social spaces. Alongside an exploration of how these factors construct a different affective experience for the reader I analyse the critical position performance poetry holds in relation to the wider body of poetics. Performance poetry has been relatively absent from critical study of poetry and the formation of a poetic canon in the UK. I contend that there has traditionally been an opposition to performance poetry in the academy, defined along the lines of a 'high' and 'low' art binary. This is a contention I analyse with focus on the development of UK poetics in the mid-20th century. By assessing the value discourses inherent to an academic appraisal of spoken word I stage a discussion of the pedagogical potential of performance poetry. Combining both the affective capacities of performance and the role performance plays in renegotiating our experiences of social and shared spaces, I argue performance is an important tool for structuring a re-engagement with contemporary poetry. Tracing the potential pedagogical implications of performance poetry through each of these aspects brings the thesis to a conclusion regarding the value of contemporary UK performance poetry and the important pedagogical role it plays. Underpinning my analysis, I conduct interviews with various prominent UK performance poets in order to construct an accurate account of the contemporary performance poetry scene, and to facilitate predictions regarding its future development.

Introduction

In the 2015 BBC 4 documentary *Rhymes, Rock & Revolution: The Story of Performance Poetry*, the British poet Lemn Sissay stated that: ‘the 1960s were probably the best time for poets as rock and roll pop culture icons – except for now – now poetry is stronger, more powerful, more present, more dynamic than it’s ever been since the beginning of time’.¹ The claim, audacious though it may be, addresses a shift in the consumption of poetry, one of many which have accompanied developments in media and methods of reception. In this thesis I explore one particular method: the role of performance in contemporary UK poetics. In an article by Peter Howarth, published by *The Independent* on October 6, 2015 (and roughly concurrent with Sissay’s remarks) Howarth claimed that: ‘Performance poetry has come a long way since its alternative 1960s roots, but it still falls foul of traditionalists’.² The essence of the disparity Howarth proposes articulates ‘a serious division between poets who write words for the page and

¹ Lemn Sissay, *Rhymes, Rock & Revolution: The Story of Performance Poetry*, BBC4, 11 October 2015 [accessed 12 October 2015].

² Howarth, Peter, ‘National Poetry Day: The rise and rise of performance poetry’, *The Independent*, 06 October 2015 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/national-poetry-day-the-rise-and-rise-of-performance-poetry-a6683576.html> Tuesday 6 October 2015> [accessed 23 October 2015].

those who aim for the stage'.³ The page versus stage debate is a common resort for critics seeking to articulate how one can provide a frame of reference for understanding the differences, be they physical, emotional, or experiential between reading poetry from the page, and experiencing poetry through performance. Referring to the page versus stage debate, Howarth underlines the problematic question of value implicit in the opposition ('The latter have long been dismissed as lightweight; too desperate for applause to say anything truthful') and the question of the presence of performance within contemporary poetics ('Yet poetry made for live performance now gathers audiences that page-poetry can only dream of').⁴ Both questions are vital to my discussion of the role of performance in contemporary poetics.

Any study of the performance aspects of poetry is frustrated by the range of terms used to describe performance poetry. A study of performance in UK poetics first requires a delineation of the terminology used in relation to the complicated identity of performance poetry. For the contemporary audience performance poetry can and will be referred to variously as 'Slam', 'Spoken Word', 'Open Mic', and a host of other localized socio-cultural terms that depend on the context of the performance. Attempting to trace the deep oral traditions of poetry exemplifies the difficulty of the project.⁵ There are names, and there are many of them. For the

³ Howarth, 'National Poetry Day'.

⁴ Howarth, 'National Poetry Day'.

⁵ Projects which undergo research into poetry's oral contexts (with varying success) can be examined in, for example: Viv Edwards and Thomas J Sienkewicz, *Oral Cultures Past And Present* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); Ruth H. Finnegan, *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Beverley Whitaker Long, and Mary Francis Hopkins, *Performing Literature: An Introduction to Oral Interpretation*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1982). The relationships between oral traditions in poetry and contemporary performance poetics will be discussed in greater detail later in my thesis, however, as Long and Hopkins aver in the

purposes of my argument, I elucidate more prominent aspects of the nomenclature distinguished in the division of performance poetry, initially the term itself, followed by the distinctions which can be drawn between Slam and Spoken Word. These two forms constitute a large proportion of poetry that is labelled as performed, and speak most directly to the issues concerning 'stage poetry'.

The term 'performance poetry' originated from a 1981 press release in the Austin Chronicle *Litera* column. The press release was issued by the American avant-garde poet and artist Hedwig Gorski, who was engaging in a number of theatre and performance projects, including a collaborative conceptual project that involved the performance of her own poetry alongside music performed by the East of Eden Band. Gorski's intention was to separate the public performance of poetry from the cultures of performance art developing in the latter decades of the twentieth-century, and to indicate a distinction in the writing process whereby poetry was written for oral presentation rather than for traditional print publication. On Gorski's own website, in 'The Hedwig Gorski Glossaria of Terms Coinage' she offers the following definition:

Performance Poet(ry)- Originally used to describe *Booby, Mama!* (1977) a new verse drama before publication of the term in the Austin Chronicle *Litera* column (1981). Text-dominated performance art.

introduction to their text: 'The shared oral experience is likely to reveal insights to the audience that they overlooked, or enhance those they may not have appreciated fully in their own silent reading' (Long, p.xiii).

Poetry written for or during performance instead of for print publication.⁶

The above definition exposes the utility of the term through a clearly demarcated relationship with print poetry. The Gorskian definition of performance poetry is distinguished by its emphasis on intent; writing for print publication situated against writing for the voice. With this in mind, the fact that performance poetry often functions as an umbrella term in discussing stage versus page poetics is elucidating. It shapes the narrative of an analysis of performance poetics by firmly placing the generic term at one end of a media spectrum.

The title of my thesis 'Slam the Book' refers to the prominence and the salience of one particular medium of performed poetry, the poetry Slam, a burgeoning phenomenon which began in the US in the mid 1980s and now dominates much of the performance poetry scene.⁷ To the majority of people who have never experienced a poetry Slam (and no small number of initiated audience members) Slam is incorrectly deployed as a way to describe a particular style or genre of performance poem. The original definition of Slam poetry can be understood from the following quote from Slam veteran Buddy Wakefield: "Slam poetry" is a term that seems to have evolved into a generalization, given to a style of delivery culminating in rapid, rhythmic, cathartic voice and presence[...] Poetry

⁶ Hedwig Gorski, 'The Hedwig Gorski Glossaria of Terms Coinage'

<<https://sites.google.com/site/hedwiggorskisite/>> [accessed 14 May 2014].

⁷ Regarding the inception of Slam in the UK, in John Paul O'Neill's 2012 article in *The Huffington Post UK* he claims to have held the first UK Slam in 1994: John Paul O'Neill, 'Almost Eighteen Years On - How Poetry Slam Arrived in the UK!', *The Huffington Post UK*, 15 February 2012

<http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/john-paul-o/poetry-slam-farrago_b_1153590.html> [accessed 2 June 2016].

Slam is an event. Slam poetry does not exist (not outside of its practical role of being any given poem entered into a Poetry Slam)'.⁸ The term in its original sense, the name of an event, has been appropriated to refer to the poetry that is performed and practiced at the event. To offer some justification, this misconception is not assisted by the vocabulary that surrounds the experience of a Slam Poetry event (slamming, slammers, slammasters)⁹ however it still facilitates a distinction that lies at the heart of Slam's recognition, or lack thereof, within certain circles of the poetry world. The synecdoche echoes a tendency towards generalization, asserting homogeneity to the style of performance and the text of the poetry itself.

Having established that Slam is a specific, contingent event, and that 'Slam poetry' is reliant on a Slam 'event' to exist, for the purposes of setting out the nomenclature a large and important aspect of the discourse of performance poetry has been addressed. However, because of this contingency Slam may be the most easily defined aspect of the vocabulary of performance poetry. Outside of Slam, one of the most common labels associated with contemporary performed poetry is 'spoken word'. From a semantic perspective there is of course overt reason to employ this terminology; it is transparent, it offers what one would expect from performed poetry, words (from the page) that are being spoken (on the stage). The origin of the appellation itself however does carry connotations that are not

⁸ Buddy Wakefield, 'I Am Exploring the Distance: A Talk with Buddy Wakefield', *Used Furniture Review*, 23 April 2012 <<http://usedfurniturereview.com/2012/04/23/i-am-exploring-the-distance-a-talk-with-buddy-wakefield/>> [accessed 19 March 2014].

⁹ For a more detailed breakdown of this terminology see: Marc Kelly Smith and Joe Kraynak, *The Complete Idiot's Guide To Slam Poetry* (Indianapolis, IN: Alpha Books, 2004).

generically applicable; indeed, they often depart significantly from the tone and register of the poetry that is being offered up under the name. 'Spoken Word' first started being used in the early twentieth century to denote recorded and performed texts of radio broadcasts as a way of separating them from text based journalism and radio plays. What is important to note is that this is a denotation that exists as an aspect of the language of commerce. When the Grammy Awards were established in 1958 a category was created to reward 'Best Documentary or Spoken Word Performance'. As a result, the recording industry began a concerted campaign to latch on to spoken word, which had already developed a strong association with hip-hop in the US. The ability to quickly and bloodlessly link the already media-dominant hip-hop and its lucrative market to the emerging popularity of spoken word ensured an influx of new material and talent for the former and the guarantee of success to the latter. Though an encouraging sign for increasing the popularity of poetry in general, this new form of performance poetry was not accepted without issues. The label 'spoken word' is described by poet and performer Ray McNeice as 'a talent agency ad-man's camouflage of the P-word lest it drive away [the] audience in droves'.¹⁰ Engaging with what appeared to be a rebranding of the dull, lacklustre poetry market was often associated with selling-out. Artists, poets and performers who, like Spoken Word itself, sat at the nexus of hip-hop and poetry (and who contributed most to the body of Spoken Word performances and recordings) were given short shrift by their peers, most notably those who had aligned themselves with the Slam movement.

¹⁰ Ray McNeice, 'Just Call It Poetry', *Another Chicago Magazine* 32-33 (1997), pp.69-70.

The origin of this label has somewhat lost its distinction for a contemporary audience. Spoken Word is used interchangeably to denote an event where one would expect to see some poetry being performed. The fact that the misperception exists is evidence to suggest that since its beginnings, spoken word has been re-appropriated back into the milieu of performance poetry, no longer engendering the commercial denotations it once did. It is important to retain this information during any investigation into the motivations held by poets who are performing poetry. It sheds light on the interplay involved in a large aspect of the performance medium, as Susan B. A. Somers-Willett states in her 2009 critical study *The Cultural Politics of Slam Poetry; Race, Identity and the Performance of Popular Verse in America*: 'the term *spoken word* has, unbeknownst to many of its practitioners and consumers, commercial origins'.¹¹

The provenance of the terminology itself is an interesting element of the discussion of the development of oral poetics. However, for the purposes of my investigation I recognize the cultural capital both 'performance poetry' and 'spoken word' possess as signifiers of a generalized poetics of performance. In the course of my analysis I will refer to both performance poetry and spoken word as descriptions of a medium of performance which is distinct from page poetry. While the origins of the two terms may have different connotations, the two are essentially interconnected and, as I discuss, my analysis is rooted in the significance of what they share: a mutual distinction from the page. Since its origin in Chicago in 1986, Slam remains a vital part of the US performance poetry scene, though the weight of

¹¹ Susan B.A. Somers-Willett, *The Cultural Politics of Slam Poetry; Race, Identity and the Performance of Popular Verse in America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009) p.100.

its success has not necessarily translated to the UK.¹² It is becoming increasingly difficult for Slam to hold on to its identity as a counter-cultural alternative with the rise of the commercialized spoken word artist; nonetheless, poets at National Poetry Slams are still held to rules established over two decades ago and venues like the Nuyorican Café are still treated with reverence by touring performance poets.¹³ It is easy to dismiss certain aspects of Slam as derivative and uninspired, with motivations more grounded in commercial success, but this is the nature of any medium that accedes to the conditions of popular and public visibility, and Slam's difficult history demonstrates that beneath the flash and glamour of its current manifestation there is a distinct corpus of development.¹⁴ Any misappropriated critique of a 'Slam style' should be read in the context of the understanding that Slam is an event, the style having developed out of commonly observed traits and qualities in poems performed at such an event. By establishing this now, the tendency to view Slam Poetry simply as a label for a generic style of performance can be avoided, as can be the temptation to dismiss all performance poetry under a blanket devaluation of Slam based on its status as a particular form

¹² Relative popularity is a difficult metric to assess, yet while US Slam and spoken word scenes demonstrate all signs of a healthy sedimentation in the contemporary cultural landscape, there has been a tranche of UK online reportage in the last five years exhorting the newness and the freshness of spoken word which is suggestive of a comparatively nascent scene in the UK. See, for example: Daisy Bowie-Sell, 'Is poetry the new comedy?', *The Telegraph*, 11 January 2013 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/authorinterviews/9789892/Is-poetry-the-new-comedy.html>> [accessed 17 July 2014]; or James Bunting, 'Dean Atta – When Poetry Speaks Up', *The Huffington Post UK*, 13 March 2012 <http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/james-bunting/dean-atta-i-am-nobodys-nigger_b_1200145.html> [accessed 05 November 2014]; or Sam Wolfson, 'Kate Tempest: the performance poet who can't be ignored', *The Guardian Online*, 10 April 2013 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/apr/10/kate-tempest-performance-poet-cant-be-ignored>> [accessed 16 May 2014].

¹³ A detailed discussion of the political elements of Slam's grassroots origins can be found in the following article: Noel Urayoán, 'Counter/public address: Nuyorican poetries in the slam era', in *Latino Studies*, Volume 9. Issue 1 (2011), pp.38-61.

¹⁴ For a further analysis of Slam see: Tim Clare, 'Slam: A Poetic Dialogue', in *Stress Fractures: Essays on Poetry*, ed. by Tom Chivers (London: Penned In The Margins 2010), pp.135-141.

of entertainment. This prevents the inclination to overlook its importance as a platform for encouraging development and experimentation within contemporary poetry. One must also recognize that Slam's specific contextual identity as a competitive event prompts certain criticisms which are unique to it. Although Slam's successes highlight its importance to the contemporary performance poetry scene in the course of my analysis I hold Slam poetry outside of the general category of performance poetry unless otherwise stated.

Attempts to trace the beginnings of a contemporary performance poetry scene in the UK are frustrated by the very fact that the current performance poetry scene is arguably rather nebulous. One might be tempted to identify the International Poetry Incarnation, an event held at the Royal Albert Hall in London on 11 June 1965 as a site of origin.¹⁵ This event featured performances from prominent UK poets such as Adrian Mitchell, Michael Horovitz, Pete Brown, and the British Revivalist Christopher Logue, alongside an international gathering of poets and performers including Anselm Holo, Andrei Voznesensky, and a complement of some of the major Beat poets of the generation; Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, Gregory Corso, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti. The International Poetry Incarnation showcased the potential for emerging, dissident strands of UK poetics engaged specifically with performance. Although the writers who were present at the event all published for the page, the nature of the event itself gestured towards a widening space for the performance of poetry to occupy. The event also invigorated

¹⁵ Lydia Smith, '11 June 1965: Allen Ginsberg and the beat poets create a cultural storm at the Hall', *Royal Albert Hall Online*, 04 January 2016 <<http://www.royalalberthall.com/about-the-hall/news/2016/january/11-june-1965-allen-ginsberg-and-the-beat-poets-create-a-cultural-storm-at-the-hall/>> [accessed 19 June 2016].

a number of counter-culture movements in the poetry scene, including ranting poetry which developed in the late 1970s in line with punk lit.¹⁶ Additionally, the increased focus on spoken word and performance had great influence upon the 1960s Liverpool poetry revolution, emphasized by the 1967 publication of *The Mersey Sound*.¹⁷

The development of strands of poetry which diminish focus on page receipt is of course important when one considers the cultural significance of poetry. However, contemporaneous to the rise of popular performances of poetry, major figures in the British academy criticized these developments. In a *Paris Review* interview conducted in 1982 by Robert Phillips the poet Philip Larkin argued:

I don't give readings, no, although I have recorded three of my collections, just to show how I should read them. Hearing a poem, as opposed to reading it on the page, means you miss so much—the shape, the punctuation, the italics, even knowing how far you are from the end. Reading it on the page means you can go your own pace, taking it in properly; hearing it means you're dragged along at the speaker's own rate, missing things, not taking it in, confusing 'there' and 'their' and things like that. And the speaker may interpose his own

¹⁶ For further information regarding ranting poetry and punk lit see: Greg Freeman, 'Still angry after all these years: heroes of Ranting poetry keep the flame alive', *WriteOutLoud*, 19 June 2015 <<http://www.writeoutloud.net/public/blogentry.php?blogentryid=49522>> [accessed 02 July 2016].

¹⁷ Adrian Henri, Roger McGough and Brian Patten, *The Mersey Sound* (London: Penguin, 1967).

personality between you and the poem, for better or worse. For that matter, so may the audience.¹⁸

Larkin's uncharitable disposition towards the performance of poetry was by no means the idiosyncratic perspective of a notoriously solitary and dour poet in the twilight of his years. Larkin expressed a common academic mistrust of performance poetry¹⁹ which finds a more contemporary echo in the following statement made by the critic Harold Bloom in 2000 again in the *Paris Review*:

I can't bear these accounts I read in the *Times* and elsewhere of these poetry slams, in which various young men and women in various late-spots are declaiming rant and nonsense at each other. The whole thing is judged by an applause meter which is actually not there, but might as well be. This isn't even silly; it is the death of art.²⁰

Bloom's criticism of the judging of a Slam poetry event, and specifically the competitive aesthetic Slam generates, indicates where exactly he draws up his battle lines with respect to the medium. Pre-supposing one overlooks the problems inculcated in Bloom's mutual exclusion of popularity and artistic merit, it still appears that his fiercest issue with the medium is the simultaneous live amalgamation of audience with evaluator. He refers to the invisible clap-o-meter as

¹⁸ Philip Larkin, 'The Art of Poetry No. 30', *The Paris Review*, Issue 84 (1982) <<http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/3153/the-art-of-poetry-no-30-philip-larkin>> [accessed 15 March 2014].

¹⁹ For further criticism of performance poetry see: Roberta E. Berke, *Bounds Out of Bounds* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); Albert B. Lord, 'Homer as Oral Poet', in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, Volume 72 (1968), pp.1-46; Glenn Wilson, *The Psychology of the Performing Self* (New York: St. Martin's, 1985); Cornelia Graebner, 'Is performance poetry dead?', in *Poetry Review*, Volume 97. Issue 2 (2007), pp.78-82.

²⁰ Harold Bloom, et al., 'The Man in the Back Row Has a Question VI', in *The Paris Review*, Volume 42. Issue 154 (2000) pp.370-379 (p.379).

a delineator of continuing success in performance poetry – positing this as the driving factor that refines the future shape of this form of poetry, which he says will ultimately culminate in ‘the death of art’. I suggest that this speaks to a fear of cutting out the middle man of the critic, of Bloom himself, and of the academy in general, to arbitrate the quality of poetry. The ‘rant and nonsense’ Bloom identifies is a signifier of his position regarding the quality and the value of spoken word in general. Bloom’s is a fear of value dilution reflected in a distinction between high and low art. Any movement towards open access provokes a fear among elitist factions of the academy that high ‘educated’ literature will not be read or experienced, replaced by canon building that privileges a low art ‘people’s poetry’. In contrast to this position in his essay ‘Poetry into the Twenty-First Century’, published in *Fire and Ink: An Anthology of Social Action Writing* (2009), Miguel Algarin, a Puerto Rican poet, lecturer, and co-founder of the Nuyorican Poets Café (the birthplace of the New York Slam scene) outlined contemporary Slam practices, oral traditions, and relevance to contemporary society, subheading his essay ‘The Democratization of Verse’.²¹ Algarin, a key player in the early development of the Slam scene in the US²², has established himself as a fierce enemy of the kind of elitist rhetoric that critics such as Bloom level against Slam, offering a potent description of performance poetics as: ‘the reason why poetry and theatre are so

²¹ Miguel Algarin, ‘Poetry into the Twenty-First Century’, in *Fire and Ink: An Anthology of Social Action Writing*, ed. by Frances Payne Adler, Debra Busman, Diana Garcia (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009) pp.392-398.

²² For a detailed account of Algarin’s role in the development of the New York Slam scene see: Cristin O’Keefe Aptowicz, *Words In Your Face: A guided tour through twenty years of the New York City Poetry Slam* (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2008).

intertwined, and why both are entering into the twenty-first century alive and well'.²³

The introduction of a binary between high and low art invites a consideration of the international perception of poetry in the latter half of the twentieth century. While the British public experienced popular factions of counter-culture poets reacting against the academy's disenfranchisement with spoken word, a debate raged in the US asking if poetry had value at all. Joseph Epstein's seminal 1988 editorial 'Who Killed Poetry?' in the magazine *Commentary* argued that poetry was no longer being enjoyed by the public, trapped as it was in a vacuum created and perpetuated by the academy, and the swathes of MFAs and creative writing programmes spreading across the US.²⁴ This attack highlighted questions regarding the status of poetry and its relevance to a modern audience. In 1991 the US poet and critic Dana Gioia penned a response entitled 'Can Poetry Matter' in *The Atlantic Monthly* claiming that Americans had 'a superabundance of poetry within a small class and [an] impoverishment outside it'.²⁵ He further added that: 'One might even say that outside the classroom- where society demands that the two groups interact – poets and the common reader are no longer on speaking terms'.²⁶ The debate posited a turn of the century climate featuring an increasing number of discontented poets who were looking for a venue to read in without academic 'supervision' and of audiences who were looking for a way to engage and

²³ Algarin, p.395.

²⁴ Joseph Epstein, 'Who Killed Poetry?', in *Commentary*, Volume 86, Issue 2 (1988) pp.13-20.

²⁵ Dana Gioia, 'Can Poetry Matter?', in *Can Poetry Matter? Essays on Poetry and American Culture* (Saint Paul: Graywolf, 1992) pp.1-24 (p.10).

²⁶ Gioia, 'Can Poetry Matter?', p.19.

reconnect with poetry. I posit that this offered fertile ground for performance poetry to be nurtured.

Examining the value of performance poetry in the UK may suggest an increased awareness and participation in performance poetry, however it does not yet suggest a fully-fledged movement. This is due in no small degree to the fact that the spoken word revolution faces its own contemporary detractors. In an article for *The Independent* written in February 2013 and titled 'Poetry slams do nothing to help the art form survive' former performance poet Nathan A. Thompson contends that: 'Like sipping a fine wine, reading poetry cannot be rushed. It reveals its pleasures over time, rewarding the careful reader with something new and beautiful each time. It runs bang against the grain of our quick-fix culture. It is already a lost discipline'.²⁷ Thompson's message is a divisive one, suggesting that spoken word unmasks the poetry consumer who has no investment in the poetry and would rather take the quick fix apparently offered by the performance poet: 'The only division in poetry is between those people willing to take the time to read it and those who will not'.²⁸ Similar to Bloom, Thompson attacks the soft target of Slam, citing the danger of allowing an audience free reign over their own capacity to evaluate:

A further nail in the coffin is the rise of poetry slams. I have performed at many slams and the audience is almost always half drunk and if you want to win you have to pitch your poem pretty low. The result is a

²⁷ Nathan A. Thompson, 'Poetry slams do nothing to help the art form survive', *The Independent*, 01 February 2013 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/features/poetry-slams-do-nothing-to-help-the-art-form-survive-8475599.html>> [accessed 12 December 2014].

²⁸ Thompson, 'Poetry slams do nothing...'.

scene rife with the poetic equivalent of nob jokes – and plenty of actual nob jokes.²⁹

Thompson ends with a cautionary statement - 'We cannot allow slam poetry to replace the role poetry plays in our lives. The threat is there'³⁰ - the implications of which are clear: we cannot allow slam poetry to replace the role 'real' poetry plays in our lives.

Thompson's article is representative of a perspective regarding spoken word which is still prevalent in contemporary British poetics. However, despite the detraction there is a critical counter-point angled towards the potential role performance poetry may play. In a *Paris Review* interview with the British poet James Fenton conducted in 2012 Fenton stated:

I do know that what happened to poetry in the twentieth century was that it began to be written for the page. When it's a question of typography, why not? Poets have done beautiful things with typography—Apollinaire's Calligrammes, that sort of thing. But now we are left with people who write only for the page, who feel that a poem is something very far from performance.³¹

Fenton's further comments: 'I think it's no shame for a poet to think of what performance involves and even to write something that's beyond his capacity as a

²⁹ Thompson, 'Poetry slams do nothing...'.
³⁰ Thompson, 'Poetry slams do nothing...'.
³¹ James Fenton, 'The Art of Poetry No. 96', *The Paris Review*, Issue 202 (2012)

<<http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/6166/the-art-of-poetry-no-96-james-fenton>> [accessed 18 March 2014].

performer. When poets do readings, they benefit from the charitable nature of the audience'³² somewhat reveal a tacit recognition of the sentiment that pervades hierarchized impressions of the page versus stage division, however the fact that he presents the possibility of a different direction for contemporary poetics is itself of value. At the 2014 Northern Lights Writers' Conference held in Manchester, the author and critic Will Self argued that young people setting out as writers must explore new media in order to ensure their survival in the industry. Self was explicit in his appraisal of not only digital and e-media potentials, but also of performance, and the type of conceptual practice which can be seen in contemporary poetics. When speaking with Self after the event about the contemporary performance poetry scene he averred:

Just as within music people are feeling that the only possible way they can add value to the experience of well-established forms of cultural capital (from a consumer point of view) is to attend a live cultural event, from the point of view of the producers it creates capital. But outside of the paradigm of capital and consumption, performance represents a fascinating and radical shift, which will certainly have impacts on the future.³³

Notably, the ideological presentation of capital production which lies at the heart of a performance event does not, for Self, attenuate the 'radical shift' which is the promise of performance poetics. The incumbent Oxford Professor of Poetry

³² Fenton, 'The Art of Poetry'.

³³ Will Self, interviewed by Jack McGowan, 25 October 2014.

Simon Armitage's inaugural lecture delivered on the 24th of November 2015 also offers a firm statement of support for performance in contemporary poetics. Armitage included reference to Claudia Rankine's much feted *Citizen: An American Lyric*³⁴ in a bid to outline how contemporary poetry had expanded its boundaries. However, it is Armitage's later references to 'signs of vitality, strength, and even popularity in the world of poetry, voices making themselves heard above the usual, low level background hum' which are of particular note.³⁵ Armitage referenced the developing performance poetry scene in the UK, recalling that 'Over the last couple of decades or so a poetic movement has emerged or re-emerged through clubs and events, a movement which thrives in live environments'.³⁶ It is hard to imagine Armitage's inaugural lecture for the Oxford Professorship as being anything other than an attempt to outline his opinion of the purview of the role, particularly given a perceived imperative to defend the shifting cultural value of poetry. In this context the implication of Armitage's acknowledgment of the audiences drawn by contemporary spoken word, 'audiences of hundreds, sometimes thousands, with a huge hunger for unaccompanied language',³⁷ stands as a strong defense for performance poetics. Predictably Armitage rebukes a sample of spoken word: 'facile rubbish, cheap gags, vacuous life-affirming statements, the soliciting of instant response and the over –emoted serving of already over egged puddings'³⁸

³⁴ Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (London: Penguin, 2015).

³⁵ Simon Armitage, 'Oxford University Professor of Poetry Inaugural Lecture', *Oxford University*, 24 November 2015 <<https://audioboom.com/boos/3865399-simon-armitage-s-inaugural-lecture-as-professor-of-poetry-at-the-university-of-oxford>> [accessed 28 January 2016].

³⁶ Armitage, 'Poetry Inaugural'.

³⁷ Armitage, 'Poetry Inaugural'.

³⁸ Armitage, 'Poetry Inaugural'.

but this does not succeed in diminishing his faith in the potential of performance poetry, and of performance poets who exemplify the medium:

Among those who have surpassed their contemporaries Kate Tempest is the most prominent. Once categorized and perhaps demeaned by the literati as a performance poet, Tempest's reputation has burgeoned with the very force of her surname to the point where the poetry establishment has been unable to ignore her. Her across-the-board appeal has seen her appear on one of the main stages at Glastonbury Festival and receive the Ted Hughes award for new work in poetry in close succession.³⁹

Kate Tempest's success extends further than Armitage's recognition. In 2013 she received the Ted Hughes Award for *Brand New Ancients*⁴⁰, a text which has been labeled a spoken word collection. This was a plaudit matched evenly by her nomination in 2014 as one of the Poetry Society's Next Generation Poets, 2014 also being the year Tempest's debut album received a Mercury Prize for best hip hop album. Despite Tempest's work across various mediums Armitage gestures towards both the presence and the misconception of her detractors by highlighting the imbalance of poetic modes, an assumed correlative of the high versus low art binary:

It would be easy to criticize Tempest on the basis that the visual, printed manifestations of the work fail to convey that winning combination of

³⁹ Armitage, 'Poetry Inaugural'.

⁴⁰ Kate Tempest, *Brand New Ancients* (London: Picador, 2013).

verbal dynamism and disarming innocence which has become her trademark and which has also won her so many admirers. But to demote her to a literary subset on that basis would be to insist that the printed form of poetry is its primary mode, with performed or spoken versions playing a supporting or secondary role; poetry having a day out as it were.⁴¹

In the course of his hour long lecture the fact that Armitage devotes such time to defending spoken word is a telling sign of the potential (yet not realized) power it might exert over contemporary poetics. Armitage denounces those establishment poets who would seek to relegate performance poetry to a secondary or supportive role.⁴² In doing so he is offering a means to understand spoken word as both a fresh revitalization (the hitherto unobserved 'signs of vitality, strength' previously noted) and a re-substantiation of the heritage of poetry as oral performance. The tenability of this bifurcated vision of performance poetry is one of the questions that I address in the course of my investigation. A further line of inquiry is the physical dimensions of the performance, which help to shape an understanding of the distinctions between the modes of receipt. For Armitage, a poet like Tempest delivers an experience of poetry which stands resolutely separate from the

⁴¹ Armitage, 'Poetry Inaugural'.

⁴² Even more telling perhaps is the statement made at the close of the following excerpt: 'A churlish position to take I'd argue, because even post-Caxton for a long while poetry continued to be a spoken or recited art, with an emphasis on sonic or acoustic properties. And even through its most bookish and mute phases there have always been performers and performances and before that, when it was conducted around a campfire, or at the temple, or in the amphitheatre poetry's instinctive address was to the ear not the eye and writing was a means of warehousing and distribution rather than the product itself. So in those wider and longer terms we could even think of Kate Tempest et al as defenders of poetry's original practices, traditionalists if you like' (Armitage, 'Poetry Inaugural').

traditions of the page, evoking the oxymora of air and ink in his description of her poetic craft:

At another level Kate Tempest has put the body back into poetry, bestowing her work with a presence and physicality which, once seen and heard, goes on inhabiting the poems through to their printed iterations and delivering a tantalizing sense of human proximity when many other poets operate at a remote distance and from behind the fire curtain of the book, practitioners of a plastic art. Tempest's poetry is made of squeezed air, not smeared ink.⁴³

Once again by remonstrating with the remoteness of the contemporary page poet Armitage is drawing upon the undeniable strength of performance poetry: its popular consumption. In doing so he redraws lines and re-presents schemas, the force of his rhetoric simultaneously denouncing the current divisions between poetry and the reader and casting spoken word as an avatar of the vox populi: 'The numbers are staggering, millions upon millions of people have watched film clips of spoken word poets in action in quantities and at a frequency that the poetry world has never previously dealt with. Recalibration has been necessary, noughts have been added'.⁴⁴ This comes in the wake of an announcement of his personal reading inclinations: 'A preference for the speaking and singing voice in poetry over the written or cerebral voice... a predilection for poems commissioned by the mind but designed by the mouth'.⁴⁵ Armitage's final salvo, an analysis of Aracelis Girmay's

⁴³ Armitage, 'Poetry Inaugural'.

⁴⁴ Armitage, 'Poetry Inaugural'.

⁴⁵ Armitage, 'Poetry Inaugural'.

‘Elegy in Gold’ from the widely acclaimed 2015 anthology *The BreakBeat Poets New American Poetry in the Age of Hip-Hop*⁴⁶ is a firm indication of Armitage’s commitment to bringing together the disparate, previously dissociated elements of contemporary poetry. Armitage describes *The Breakbeat Poets* as ‘brusque in its stance and confrontational in its approach’⁴⁷: one might intuit from this the sense that Armitage believes a bit of brusqueness or confrontation would not go amiss in the contemporary poetry scene. By this token a necessary space for spoken word might become more visible.

How that space shapes itself, and the complications that arise from the attempt, form the basis of my investigation. The structure of my thesis is determined by three areas of research divided into the three chapters that follow. Chapter one analyses the relationship between the contemporary performance poetry scene and the UK academy. This is facilitated by an investigation of the relative absence of critical attention to performance poetry⁴⁸, and the absence of performance poetry on UK HE syllabuses, as well as an analysis of what trends in twentieth century literary studies may have contributed to this absence. One does not have to look far to find examples of critical material which engages with voice in

⁴⁶ Aracelis Girmay, ‘Elegy in Gold’, in *The BreakBeat Poets New American Poetry in the Age of Hip-Hop*, ed. by Kevin Coval, Quraysh Ali Lansana, and Nate Marshall (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2015) p.151.

⁴⁷ Armitage, ‘Poetry Inaugural’.

⁴⁸ While there is certainly a discussion I participate in, extensive critical analysis of performance poetry is, I argue, lacking. Examples of contemporary critical approaches to performance poetry include texts such as: Don Cusic, *The Poet as Performer* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1991) which seeks to establish individuals who evince characteristics of both categories and from this extrapolate a notion of the ‘poet-performer’. However, this does not address the multiplicity of approaches to the notion of how a spoken word performer operates which I address in my thesis. Equally, Mark Robinson’s edited collection of essays: Mark Robinson, *Words Out Loud: Ten Essays About Poetry Readings* (Exeter: Stride, 2002) offers interesting avenues into the topic, but offers (intentionally) a collection of provocations rather than a concerted study.

poetics. One of the most prominent examples, Charles Olson's 1950 manifesto 'Projective Verse', attempts to articulate interlocutions between poetry for the page and representation of the voice or breath in the written medium.⁴⁹ In doing so Olson acknowledges that 'a poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it (he will have some several causations), by way of the poem itself to, all the over to, the reader',⁵⁰ thus opening a space to discuss the vitality of poetry (a vitality I discuss in terms of affective potential). Olson's offers the breath as a vital antidote to the stagnation he perceives in the composition and the close reading of verse:

If I hammer, if I recall in, and keep calling in, the breath, the breathing as distinguished from hearing, it is for cause, it is to insist upon a part that breath plays in verse which has not (due, I think, to the smothering of the power of the line by too set a concept of foot) has not been sufficiently observed or practiced, but which has to be if verse is to advance to its proper force and place in the day, now, and ahead. I take it that PROJECTIVE VERSE teaches, is, this lesson, that that verse will only do in which a poet manages to register both the acquisitions of his ear and the pressures of his breath.⁵¹

Olson centrally positions the spoken word in the production of verse: 'breath allows all the speech-force of language back in (speech is the 'solid' of verse, is the secret of a poem's energy)'⁵² further offering printed text as an obstruction of sorts,

⁴⁹ Charles Olson, 'Projective Verse', in *Collected Prose*, ed. by Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1997) pp. 239-249.

⁵⁰ Olson, p.240.

⁵¹ Olson, p.241.

⁵² Olson, p.244.

separating reader and writer from the very origin of poetic composition: 'What we have suffered from, is manuscript, press, the removal of verse from its producer and its reproducer, the voice, a removal by one, by two removes from its place of origin and its destination'.⁵³ In doing so Olson appears to situate himself as a strong ally in the defence of performance poetics against a hegemony of the page.

However, Olson's theory of projective verse intimately and fundamentally retains its connection to the materiality of the page. Olson discusses the typewriter as a paradigm shifting invention which lends the poet the ability to materially represent orality (breath) through blank space on the page. This is a materiality which is coded clearly in terms which distance the poem from the actual bodily performance. Olson offers projective verse as a type of musical score: 'for the first time the poet has the stave and the bar a musician has had', one which acts 'as a scoring to his composition, as a script to its vocalization'.⁵⁴ The point at which Olson critically departs from my analysis of performance poetics lies in this attendance to the page. Critical material which recognizes breath, voice, or orality in terms of the page exhibits strong links to the sort of research I undertake. However, the aforementioned dearth of critical attention to performance is underscored by an absence of research focused specifically on the affective, bodily element of live performance and the ways in which performance renegotiates occupation and utilization of space, two constitutive elements of performance poetry which form the second and third chapters of my thesis respectively. As the critic Richard Bauman states in his text *Verbal Art as Performance* (1975) 'A performance-centred

⁵³ Olson, p.245.

⁵⁴ Olson, p.245.

conception of verbal art calls for an approach through performance itself. In such an approach, the formal manipulation of linguistic features is secondary to the nature of performance, per se, conceived of and defined as a mode of communication'.⁵⁵ From this description of a performance orientated critical enquiry I take strong justification for further exploration of the lacuna of performance in contemporary poetry criticism.

Through a deconstruction of the dominant modes of literary criticism in the early twentieth century I contend a trajectory of academic attention to text analysis which relegated performance as an alternative medium for the study of poetry. The main critical focus points of this investigation focus on a comparative transatlantic assessment of the work of F. R. Leavis and F. O. Matthiessen.⁵⁶ I argue that the rationale behind the academy's lack of interest in performance poetry arises from the humanities' complex relationship to value (in a loose binary between arts and sciences). I explore this relationship to value further by investigating elitist tendencies in academic reception of poetry with specific reference to the work of Matthew Arnold, more contemporary focus on poetry debates in the twenty-first century, and an investigation into the Two Cultures debate which, through an analysis of C.P. Snow, returns my investigation to F. R. Leavis. By positing value as a

⁵⁵ Richard Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance* (Rowley: Newbury House Publishers, 1977) pp.8-9.

⁵⁶ Allen Tate's selected essays *On the Limits of Poetry*, first published in 1948: Allen Tate, *On the Limits of Poetry - Selected Essays: 1928-1948* (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1970) discusses the work of these critical figures with a specific contextual perspective on what poetry ought, or ought not to do: 'poetry does not explain our experience. If we begin by thinking that it ought to 'explain' the human predicament, we shall quickly see that it does not, and we shall end up thinking that therefore it has no meaning at all' (Tate, pp.xiv-xv). While Tate's analysis is at times astute I find his general intransigence and bellicose tone difficult to swallow: 'Lessing says that poetry is not painting or sculpture; I am saying in this book, with very little systematic argument, that it is neither religion nor social engineering' (Tate, p.xi). A more salient issue (for the purposes of my thesis) is my aversion to Tate's complete lack of acknowledgment of performance, something of a theme in contemporary criticism as shall be seen.

former, shaper and delineator of modes of textual analysis I advance the notion of a pedagogy of performance which holds a degree of value which has been fundamentally overlooked by current modes of textual receipt. Subsequently I identify potential grounds for this pedagogical framework in the practical theories of I. A. Richards.

David Michael Levin's *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision* (1993)

recognises the notion that close reading practices privilege the eye over other sensory methods of appreciating a poem, notably the ear.⁵⁷ Sound plays a crucial role in the performance of poetry, and I examine this aspect of performance in this thesis,⁵⁸ taking a number of different approaches, with a particular focus on the physiological relationship between receiving sound and meaning-making, as explored by Reuven Tsur's *What Makes Sound Patterns Expressive* (1992)⁵⁹, Brandon LaBelle and Christof Migone's *Writing Aloud: The Sonics of Language* (2001)⁶⁰, and David Applebaum's *Voice* (1990).⁶¹ I believe that this role should not be overemphasized. To do so is to risk replacing a dominant mode of understanding poetry on the page, a hegemony of the eye, with a potentially equally circumscriptive hegemony of the ear. The methodology I utilize intends to extend

⁵⁷ David Michael Levin, *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993).

⁵⁸ For a valuable account of the various sensory elements of the poetic experience, see: Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002), In particular, see the following chapters: 'Sound' (pp.59-105), and 'Voice and Possession' (pp.107-143).

⁵⁹ Reuven Tsur, *What Makes Sound Patterns Expressive: The Poetic Mode of Speech Perception* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1992).

⁶⁰ Brandon LaBelle, and Christof Migone, *Writing Aloud: The Sonics of Language* (Los Angeles: Errant Bodies Press, 2001).

⁶¹ David Applebaum, *Voice* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990); see also Jean-Luc Nancy's seminal text *Listening* which offers significant contributions to the development of relationships between listening and understanding. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening*, trans. by Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007).

the understanding of how poetry is received outside of these problematic individual sensory fields, predicated upon a notion of the body as a whole as site of reception.

The body as a site of reception anticipates an examination of affect and affect transaction, which forms the second chapter of my investigation. To outline the framework of my argument, I use affect to explore the feelings generated by spoken word performances in the context of both the performer and the recipients.⁶² Crucially, affect, which the critic Brian Massumi attempts to describe⁶³ in his 1995 essay 'The Autonomy of Affect' is determined as separate from emotion: 'Affect is most often used loosely as a synonym for emotion. But one of the clearest lessons... is that emotion and affect – if affect is intensity – follow different logics and pertain to different orders'.⁶⁴ This distinction recommends affect as a tool for studying performance poetry in an academic context, since it detaches critical practice from the complications associated with using emotion as a metric for critique and evaluation.⁶⁵ As Massumi argues:

An emotion is a subjective content, the socio-linguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal... It is crucial to theorize the difference between affect and emotion. If some have the impression that it has waned, it is because

⁶² I interview a number of spoken word artists throughout my thesis and in particular my enquiries focus on the experience of performance in an affective context. For further discussion of the experience of performance see: Diane M. Moore, *Smiles Above the Platform: Poets in Public* (St. Helier, Jersey: Marc Goldring Books, 1996).

⁶³ For further explanation, see Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002).

⁶⁴ Brian Massumi, 'The Autonomy of Affect', in *Cultural Critique No. 31, The Politics of Systems and Environments, Part II* (1995) pp.83-109 (p.88).

⁶⁵ See also: Isobel Armstrong, *The Radical Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2000) in particular Part II Chapter 4 'Thinking Affect' (pp.108-148).

affect is unqualified. As such, it is not ownable or recognizable, and is thus resistant to critique.⁶⁶

In the course of my analysis I engage with affect through the investigation of a wide range of scholars and critics whose research bisects with affect studies including Baruch Spinoza, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Roland Barthes, Bruno Latour, and notably Teresa Brennan, whose studies form the backbone of my analysis of the material processes of affect in the context of performance poetry. Fundamental to this context is the relationship between affect and body, which engages with performance on an intrinsic level. The specific value of spoken word is, I argue, negotiated through the body of the performer and the language of the poem. Poetry, the spoken word in particular, situates itself as a particularly appropriate enabler of affective experience because language retains a crucial relationship to affect, as Heather Yeung argues in her 2015 text *Spatial Engagement with Poetry*:

Language itself, even without aesthetic pretensions, is an eminent producer of affect; affective engagement is the pre-eminent means by which we interact with the world. In poetry, affect is produced as much through our interaction and engagement with the figure of voice as it is through the material and thematic qualities of the poem itself...

Through the mapping of this vocalic affective engagement we can begin to understand the complex feedback loop of aesthetic experience.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Massumi, 'The Autonomy of Affect', p.88.

⁶⁷ Heather Yeung, *Spatial Engagement with Poetry* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) p.63.

The final chapter examines concerns relating to the experiential value predicated in my first chapter and the affective material processes articulated in my second chapter. The benefit of this methodological approach is that it facilitates an exploration of the spaces where performance poetry is enacted.⁶⁸ Doing so allows an interrogation of the merits of performance in transforming the social contexts of public spaces. This necessitates a study of how contemporary performance spaces have been shaped. I contend that this study is informed particularly by the emergence of trends of performance shifting into public spaces during the latter half of the nineteenth century in response to the 1843 Theatres Act.⁶⁹ This historical context evokes the complicity of key working class movements such as Chartism in bringing performance to wider and more varied audiences and is essential to shaping the space for contemporary performance poetry spaces. The critic Mike Sanders argues in his essay 'The platform and the stage: the primary aesthetics of Chartism' that 'Whereas the Chartist archive contains more than one thousand poems and scores of works of prose fiction, it has next to nothing by way of dramatic literature'.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, Sanders suggests a distinct performative element of the Chartist aesthetic regardless of this dearth of engagement with

⁶⁸ In order to bridge my chapters on affect and space I have chosen to focus initially on the work of the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty because of his particular interest in the fundamental relationship between body and space, particularly: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962).

⁶⁹ Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite's edited collection of essays *Romantic Sociability* provides an excellent background for the social contexts which precipitated and helped shape these shifts. Gillian Russell, Clara Tuite, *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain 1770-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁷⁰ Mike Sanders, 'The platform and the stage: the primary aesthetics of Chartism', in *Politics, performance and popular culture: Theatre and society in nineteenth-century Britain*, ed. by Peter Yeandle, Katherine Newey, Jeffrey Richards (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016) pp.44-59 (p.44).

traditional theatrical texts; an aesthetic which enables meta-links between performance and radical Chartist politics:

In the case of Chartism, the general absence of a Chartist dramaturgy did not arise from an antipathy towards the stage... within Chartism we find evidence of an interest in the theatre a recognition of the utility of the drama as a means of promoting sociability and generating income at a local level and a readiness to use the physical space afforded by theatres for meetings where possible.⁷¹

Shifting socio-political utilization of the stage exhibited during the mid-nineteenth century by movements such as the Chartists provides important historical context for the development of contemporary performance poetics. Sanders provides a concentrated comparison of Chartist practice and performance practice, paring down constitutive elements to identify a distinct likeness: 'At a very basic level it is possible to identify four structural necessities which the theatre shares with the Chartist meeting: a space, a platform, performers and an audience'.⁷² This deconstruction of the traditional theatre space and the concomitant emergence of a new performance space is consonant with representations of contemporary performance, which also reduces the elements of traditional theatre to better enable an affective relationship between performer and audience. Of course there is a broken line between the kind of radical social use of performance space exhibited by the Chartists in the mid-nineteenth century and contemporary uses of

⁷¹ Sanders, 'The platform and the stage', p.48.

⁷² Sanders, 'The platform and the stage', p.50.

social space for poetry performance, a break I examine in more detail over the course of my investigation. Suffice to say that the waning of Chartism until the eventual emergence of radical performance may be understood, as Sanders argues, in the context of a shift against feeling:

Both spectacle and melodrama are committed to an embodied or visceral form of politics, a politics of affect – politics as felt. In contrast, the emerging (and soon to be dominant) ‘liberal politics’ of the early Victorian period understands itself as primarily a rational contest, a struggle over meaning, and appears to champion a politics of rational persuasion: that is, a somewhat cooler and more cerebral politics of the mind... somewhere around the mid-nineteenth century there is a discernible shift in the forms of political oratory symbolised by the increasing importance given to the presentation of ‘evidence’.⁷³

Further to this, as I discuss in chapter three of my thesis, the mid-nineteenth century movement of performance from traditional theatre spaces to social spaces articulated by Jacky Bratton in her essay ‘The music hall’⁷⁴ potentially carries inherent issues of class and capital. As Caroline Radcliffe suggests in her essay ‘Theatrical hierarchy, cultural capital and the legitimate / illegitimate divide’:

The music hall’s increasingly persuasive bid to obtain a ‘free trade’ in drama... as opposed to the dramatic theatre’s adamantly protectionist response, not only demonstrates the deep-rooted historical divide

⁷³ Sanders, ‘The platform and the stage’, p.55.

⁷⁴ Jacky Bratton, ‘The music hall’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre*, ed. by Kerry Powell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) pp.164-183.

between the 'dramatic' and the 'popular' theatres of the late nineteenth century but also further reveals an embedded cultural and ideological status based both on British hierarchical structures and the centrality of cultural capital to the dramatic theatre. The nature of the music hall as a nascent 'mass' entertainment led to further divisions within the popular and dramatic theatres, leading contemporary critics of the growing industry to question its authenticity and artistic validity in the light of its success as a contemporary viable entertainment.⁷⁵

Radcliffe's discussion acknowledges the potentiality of sublimating performance poetics within means of production and consumption. However, I argue against such a materialist interpretation by foregrounding a phenomenological understanding of the experience of the poetry performance. My analysis undertakes to unpack the common presentation of the festival space in the work of key spatial theorists: Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, and Martin Heidegger. Although these theorists adopt Marxist structures (in the case of Lefebvre in particular) I separate the presentation of the festive space as outside frameworks of consumption and thus capable of dis-alienating the everyday, a process which the performance of poetry abets in various fundamental ways.

Through each of the three elements of my critical enquiry I hope to reconsider the ways in which performance poetry has been undervalued critically, underestimating the role it could potentially play in the contemporary poetic

⁷⁵ Caroline Radcliffe, 'Theatrical hierarchy, cultural capital and the legitimate / illegitimate divide', in *Politics, performance and popular culture: Theatre and society in nineteenth-century Britain*, ed. by Peter Yeandle, Katherine Newey, Jeffrey Richards (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016) pp.75-95 (pp.75-76).

landscape. Ultimately my intention is to present a body of research that will allow scholars to abrogate misgivings about the value and relevance of performance mediums within contemporary UK poetry, and establish their importance in shaping future UK poetics. This includes an investigation of the teaching of performance poetry in the academy in the UK, and an analysis of the merits of performance poetry as pedagogic methodology and as affective experience.

Chapter one

Performance poetry and the Academy

Establishing a clear picture of the contemporary academic reception of performance poetry requires an investigation of how poetry has been understood in the academy, particularly in the humanities, over the last few decades. My analysis of the reception of contemporary performance poetry in the UK in relation to both audiences and participants has revealed a number of suggestive binaries, including high/low, page/stage, and instrumental/intrinsic values. Of particular interest to the structural frame of a discourse between academic receipts and general receipts of spoken word is the relationship between 'high' and 'popular' art, and how this binary is represented by the consumers of performance poetry under the auspices of larger questions concerning value in the study of the arts. The Poetry Slam, as a forerunner of contemporary performance poetry, was cultivated as a way to allow poetry enthusiasts to view and to practice poetry outside of academia which was perceived by Slam practitioners to be elitist, restricting critical appreciation of poetry to a minority of qualified readers. Though simplified here, the extent of the non-mutuality between academic reception and public reception, and potential solutions to the problematic placement of performance poetry shapes my analysis in my first chapter.⁷⁶ To outline this chapter in brief, I present a summary of the structure of my discussion.

⁷⁶ The reason I designate this placement as problematic relates to a sense of the oddness of the lacuna of critical work surrounding performance poetry, a point acknowledged by the critic Don

In order to concentrate on the role and development of the discussion of performance poetry in the UK academy I contend that the British critic F. R. Leavis presents an effective point of first inquiry. Even if, as shall be seen, Leavis's relationship with the performance of poetry may be problematic, Leavis acknowledged (and excoriated) the state of modern poetry in his 1932 text *New Bearings in English Poetry*:

'No one could be seriously interested in the great bulk of the verse that is culled and offered to us as the fine flower of modern poetry. For the most part it is not so much bad as dead – it was never alive[...] Even such genuine poetry as the anthologies of modern verse do contain is apt, by its kind and quality, to suggest that the present age does not favour the growth of poets'.⁷⁷

Leavis thus locates himself as an apposite point of reference in a discussion of difficulties and potential changes to the critical landscape of poetics. Following my analysis of Leavis's 1969 text *Revaluation*⁷⁸ exploring Leavis's understanding of the work of Donne, Dryden, Eliot, Milton, and Swinburne I present a proposition (my own revaluation) regarding the influence of Leavis upon the English literary academy. These approaches, in response to Modernist experimentation (which notably includes the transformative potential of spoken word) were analogous to

Cusic in his text *The Poet as Performer* (1991): 'It seems ironic that so much emphasis today in the criticism of poetry is placed on the written world while performances are basically ignored, especially since poetry comes from an oral tradition. Yet, though critics deal with the written word, poetry still must somehow keep touch with its oral tradition' (Cusic, p.106).

⁷⁷F.R. Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), pp.11-12.

⁷⁸ F.R. Leavis, *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969).

the synchronic development of a study of literature in the US which was much more suited to representing the shifts and intercessions of Modernist influences upon the literary canon. In the case of the US academy I locate my analysis around the critic F.O. Matthiessen.⁷⁹ Comparing Leavis and Matthiessen, and their respective approaches, I advance reasons for the disparity of representation of performance poetry in the UK and US academies. The notion of an influencing factor shaping the presence and role of performance poetry in the academy can be borne out both in an analysis of the lack of contemporary proponents of spoken word within the UK academy, and an analysis of the perspectives of some of the exemplars. I include my interview with Lucy English from Bath Spa University, who teaches a module entitled Performance Poetry to highlight the potential place performance could occupy within the UK academy.

Once I have established an outline of the current engagement of performance poetry in the academy I address the indicative factors which constitute the high and low art binary. From the perspective of critic Marjorie Perloff, Modernist poetics introduces related questions of community and distribution, and the space Modernism affords for the exploration of performance poetry is intimately tied to these issues. In her 1991 text *Radical Artifice*⁸⁰ Perloff deplores the prize-winning uniformity and tacit unoriginality that she believes to be a hallmark of the 21st century poetry scene in her 2012 article 'Poetry on the Brink:

⁷⁹ My reading of Matthiessen's pedagogy focuses particularly on a close reading of his essay 'The Responsibilities of the Critic': F.O. Matthiessen. 'The Responsibilities of the Critic', in *Michigan Alumnus Quarterly Review*, vol. 55. Issue 24, (1949) pp.283-292.

⁸⁰ Marjorie Perloff, *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

Reinventing the Lyric'.⁸¹ This essay, and the debate generated by two responses: Matvei Yankelevich's 'The Gray Area: An Open Letter to Marjorie Perloff' (2012)⁸², and Eileen Myles's 'Painted Clear, Painted Black' (2013)⁸³, form the locus of a discussion which directs my analysis towards the problematic relationship between the contemporary spoken word scene and the question of academic elitism. To reference a quote from Eileen Myles's article; the current method for the assessment of quality in poetry becomes indivisible from the individual, quality becomes less an objective assessment, more a question of 'the quality of ones feelers'.⁸⁴ With this notion problematizing debates regarding contemporary elitism in the appreciation of the arts (and thus circumscribing meaningful discussions about the inclusion of performance poetry) I contend the importance of looking back to establish those points where one might identify changes in direction in the UK canon and academy which dictated its current shape.

The subsequent element of my analysis of performance poetics in the contemporary UK academy is underpinned by attempts to articulate the possibility of a paradigm shift contingent upon the way value is identified. Beginning with the critic Matthew Arnold, I trace through Arnold's elitist overtures in his text *Culture and Anarchy*⁸⁵ a historical context for contemporary iterations of a high/low binary,

⁸¹ Marjorie Perloff, 'Poetry on the Brink: Reinventing the Lyric', in *Boston Review*, 18 May 2012 <<https://bostonreview.net/forum/poetry-brink>> [accessed 19 February 2014].

⁸² Matvei Yankelevich, 'The Gray Area: An Open Letter to Marjorie Perloff', in *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 13 July 2012 < <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-gray-area-an-open-letter-to-marjorie-perloff/#!>> [accessed 19 February 2014].

⁸³ Eileen Myles, 'Painted Clear, Painted Black', *The Volta*, May 2013 < <http://www.thevolta.org/ewc29-emyles-p1.html>> [accessed 19 February 2014].

⁸⁴ Myles, 'Painted Clear, Painted Black'.

⁸⁵ Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy: Rethinking the Western Tradition*, ed. by Samuel Lipman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

represented by a division between the 'establishment' and the 'provincial'. Of particular importance, the rhetoric Arnold later employs in *Culture and Anarchy* may have been influenced by his famous late 1800s debate with the scientist Thomas Huxley. The Arnold/Huxley debate, situated in the wake of the Industrial Revolution, sought to negotiate the threat that the sciences and technological advancement posed to the arts both for the academy and for society as a whole. This debate was reflected almost a century later (under comparable atmospheres engendered by Modernism and the perceived deprivations of the institution of the academy) in the Two Cultures controversy; an argument held between the scientist and novelist C. P. Snow and F. R. Leavis. Returning thus to Leavis's stewardship over the English academic canon, I contend that the influences and implications of questions which address the larger horizon of a division between the sciences and the arts blinds critical faculties to smaller questions of what constitutes the arts. Rather than interrogate the value and efficacy of methods of inclusion and exclusion within the arts, the academy settles for a particular hegemonic method in an attempt to foreclose the arts from the pervasive influences of technological development and scientific thought. To recall the paradigm shift I contended, where Leavisian criticism failed to acknowledge missed potentials, I argue a platform of poetics might have been offered by Leavis's mentor I. A. Richards in his text *Practical Criticism*⁸⁶, which may have more willingly accepted the possibilities inherent in the performance of poetry. Although Richards exhibited similar elitist tendencies to his protégé Leavis, Richards critically departed through the emphasis

⁸⁶ I. A. Richards, *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgement* (London: K. Paul, 1929).

he placed on the value of the body in the appreciation of poetry, and of the affective education of feelings. Both questions of body and of education are central to the role performance poetry plays in contemporary poetics.

The final aspect of my analysis is shaped by questions Richards raises. To restate a binary, value can be determined by two identifiers: things which have instrumental value and things which have intrinsic value. In the context of the Two Cultures divide, science has always claimed instrumental value, where the arts have always been held to exhibit intrinsic value. Contemporary criticism of both the value of humanities disciplines, and the role of academic pedagogy in the arts reinscribes understanding of this division by questioning the non-negotiation of the binary.⁸⁷ This reflects upon the inclusion of performance poetics within the academy by explicit emphasis of the value of spoken word which engages both on a bodily (material level) through sensory experience, and holds pedagogical implications. These pedagogical implications do not simply relate to the dynamic and alternative platform for receiving poetry which spoken word provides, they also suggest the instrumental potential of educating our affective capacities, a discussion I take up in more detail in the proceeding chapter.

⁸⁷ For example, see: Frank Donoghue, *The Last Professors: The Twilight of the Humanities in the Corporate University* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

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A certain amount of hostility towards academia was expressed by those who developed contemporary spoken word. The father of Slam, poet Marc Kelly Smith, aligned himself in opposition to academia, which he considered to be venal and reductive in its approach to the appreciation of poetry.⁸⁸ As Cristin O'Keefe Aptowicz more diplomatically suggests in her 2008 text *Words in Your Face: A Guided Tour Through Twenty Years of the New York City Poetry Slam*, 'Smith did not think of poetry as something lofty, a refined ideal that people should strive to achieve. Rather, he believed that poetry should reflect the core of one's being, that it was a raw part of humanity, and that a poet had to be both fearless and dogged to tackle it properly'.⁸⁹ Considering that the origins of the contemporary revival of performance poetry are distinguished by a reaction against academic restriction, a dialogue between high and popular art seems to be a justified approach, one further strengthened by the relative absence of serious and invested studies of poetry in a performance medium in academic institutions in the UK especially. What I highlight is the conspicuous paucity of genuine critical interest in the performance of poetry as a way to receive poetry. Concessions are of course made to the orality of poetry (as shall be explored) but the practice of canon construction in the West has privileged an examination of poetry that focuses on the long and

⁸⁸ For a full evaluation of Marc Kelly Smith's role and relationship with the Slam scene see his chapter (including examples of his work and a short essay) in *The Spoken Word Revolution: Mark Eleveld, and Marc Kelly Smith, 'Marc Smith', in The Spoken Word Revolution: slam, hip hop & the poetry of a new generation* (Naperville: Sourcebooks Inc., 2003), pp.116-130.

⁸⁹ Cristin O'Keefe Aptowicz, *Words In Your Face: A guided tour through twenty years of the New York City Poetry Slam* (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2008), pp.117-118.

close read, the deep micro-analysis of the poem as a text, as something to be read.

My contention is that this is a perspective that mishandles the presence of performance in the traditions and the development of poetry.

I believe that the contributions Leavis made to the study of English Literature, specifically in the UK, justifies his position as a key compass point for the analysis of the trends of critical study in the academy.⁹⁰ His role as a critic operating in the mid-twentieth century positions him specifically as a major influence on the development of the UK academy. Further to this, I justify my focus on Leavis because of his particular treatment of the oral qualities he considers inherent to the construction of poetry. While maintaining the importance of the sound behind the poetic line, as will be seen in my analysis of his second major critical text *Revaluation*, he abdicates the responsibility of representing the product, the performance of poetry, out of the purview of English Studies, on grounds that this aspect falls within the province of the theatre.

According to Leavis '[The critic] endeavours to see the poetry of the present as continuation and development; that is, as the decisive, the most significant, contemporary life of tradition'.⁹¹ The supposition of a dead history of poetry spanning back through literate society is for Leavis a misconstruction; poetry's life is 'in the present or nowhere; it is alive in so far as it is alive for us'.⁹² Leavis proposes

⁹⁰ For more evidence of this justification see, for example: S. Krishnamoorthy Aithal. 'F. R. Leavis on the function of criticism', *English Studies*, Volume 62. Issue 3 (1981) pp.299-309; R.P. Bilan. *The Literary Criticism of F.R. Leavis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Dennis Ford. 'F. R. Leavis: The Critic as Moralist', *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Volume 65. Issue 2 (1982), pp. 168-180.

⁹¹ Leavis, *Revaluation*, p.1.

⁹² Leavis, *Revaluation*, p.2.

thus that the aim of the critic is 'to define, and to order in terms of its own implicit organization, a kind of ideal and impersonal living memory'.⁹³ The critical method proposed could be accepted as a valid one, but only if one first accepts that the 'living memory', this developing trajectory, the essential structure, could in reality be either ideal or impersonal. Though mindful of his own potential shortcomings, Leavis still posits his critical approach from a position that fails to accredit the relevance of performance in the practice and receipt of poetry.⁹⁴ This is an absence which struggles to be accommodated by the necessary employment of self-perception and the discrimination of relevance: 'the rule of the critic is, or should (I think) be, to work as much as possible in terms of particular analysis- analysis of poems or passages, and to say nothing that cannot be related immediately to judgements about producible texts'.⁹⁵ Though Leavis's intention may not have been to highlight and to foreground the text as the sole communicator, the assertion betrays the conspicuousness of the absence of a committed ear to performance in the critical method.

The concession, as offered above, is that the kind of critical approach taken by Leavis and other contemporaries⁹⁶ writing in the tradition of 'serious' canon

⁹³ Leavis, *Revaluation*, p.2.

⁹⁴ To treat Leavis fairly, he does not offer the pretence that the account contained in *Revaluation* is comprehensive, exhaustive, or without personal inflection: 'I think it is the business of the critic to perceive for himself, to make the finest and sharpest relevant discriminations, and to state his findings as responsibly, clearly and forcibly as possible. Then even if he is wrong he has forwarded the business of criticism- he has exposed himself as openly as possible to correction; for what criticism undertakes is the profitable discussion of literature. Anyone who works strenuously in the spirit of this conception must expect to be accused of being both dogmatic and narrow, though, naturally, where my own criticism is concerned I think the accusations unfair' (Leavis, *Revaluation*, pp.8-9).

⁹⁵ Leavis, *Revaluation*, pp.2-3.

⁹⁶ For other US and UK canon building see, for example: Yvor Winters, *Forms Of Discovery* (Chicago: Alan Swallow, 1967) or Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994).

building does make allowance for the oral quality of words as a means to pursue an understanding of the poem as a text. However, this is by no means an impartial treatment of the importance of performance. There are times when Leavis offers a hint towards some awareness of the potentiality of poetry off the page, but these fleeting references to performance are always encoded under wide, vague intimations of 'theatricality', and of 'public voice'. It is important not to forget that the notion reinforcing Leavis's approach is that of a text-based study of poetry. Unsurprisingly Leavis reaches out to T.S. Eliot⁹⁷ for support in a critique of the overly poetic Augustan Tradition, and in doing so, once again inadvertently underpins the absence of performance in his critical study: 'And to have the virtues of good prose is the first and minimum requirement of good poetry'.⁹⁸ The dialogue extant is between two written modes – the presence of performance does not figure in the negotiation.

Leavis's discussion of John Donne's work in *Revaluation* brings into play the immediacy of the speaking voice to poetry: 'Donne uses in complete dissociation from music a stanza-form that proclaims the union of poetry and music. The dissociation is positive; utterance, movement and intonation are those of the talking voice'.⁹⁹ It would appear that Leavis offers support for performance in poetry, movement towards the talking voice is a positive step away from an unusual homogeneity of artistic forms. However, this is not a re-conquest of the

⁹⁷ The maxim Leavis replicates can be found in Eliot's introduction to a 1930 edition of Samuel Johnson, *London: A Poem and The Vanity of Human Wishes* (London: Etchells and MacDonald, 1930).

⁹⁸ Leavis, *Revaluation*, p.122.

⁹⁹ Leavis, *Revaluation*, p.11.

voiced performance of poetry as the assertion cannot escape the boundaries of Leavis's preconceived categorizations:

Indeed, the subtleties of Donne's use of the speaking voice and the spoken language are inexhaustible – or might, by a reasonable hyperbole, be called so, if we were not reminded of Shakespeare. For of Shakespeare we are, in fact, notably reminded. Whether or not Donne did actually get anything from dramatic verse can only be a matter of speculation, but his own verse – the technique, the spirit in which the sinew and living nerve of English are used – suggests an appropriate development of impressions that his ear might have recorded in the theatre.¹⁰⁰

Spoken language, the insistence of a voice so pleasing to discover in Donne's poetry, cannot be assessed without reference to the theatre and to dramatic verse. Contexts of performance do not belong to the world of poetry, but to the world of theatre, and only in the theatre might they find their ideal vessel.

This analysis began in reference to a conflict of 'high' versus 'popular' art. The necessity of staging that dialogue becomes apparent when one considers Leavis's treatment of the seventeenth century poets Edmund Waller and John Dryden. Leavis is critical of Waller's refinement of the 'line of wit' to something comparatively lacking in finesse and sensitivity. Of Waller's verse, Leavis suggests: 'The taste to which it appeals has limitations of the general kind intimated by "fine

¹⁰⁰ Leavis, *Revaluation*, p.12.

ear”’.¹⁰¹ The fine ear Leavis refers to here is that of a poet such as Tennyson or Robert Browning. The implication of a statement such as this seems to support my reading of Leavis as elitist, reserving the choicest of critical attention to the ‘finest’ poets. Leavis continues by positing a comparison between Dryden’s ‘slack and monotonous’ verse, and the ‘greater fineness and profundity of organization, a much greater intensity of art’ that can be observed in the poetry of Alexander Pope.¹⁰² Crucial to an investigation of performance, Leavis states the following: ‘The comparison, of course, is unfair: Dryden’s effects are all for the public ear – for the ear in public (so to speak)’.¹⁰³ Here Leavis is explicitly conflating a lack of finesse to the poetic verse intended for public consumption, a move which can of course still be recognized in more contemporary critiques of performance poetry, for example Mark Edmundson’s 2013 article ‘Poetry Slam: Or, the decline of American Verse’: ‘Still, it’s palpably the case that the poets who now get the balance of public attention and esteem are casting unambitious spells’.¹⁰⁴ Once again, Leavis cannot discuss performance without reference to the theatre: ‘what more can one demand of dramatic verse than that it should be good verse of the theatre, giving nothing more than, well declaimed, can be appreciated on a first hearing?’¹⁰⁵ Dryden, whose genius Leavis claims ‘comes out in a certain native English strength’¹⁰⁶, a

¹⁰¹ Leavis, *Revaluation*, p.30.

¹⁰² Leavis, *Revaluation*, p.31.

¹⁰³ Leavis, *Revaluation*, pp.31-32.

¹⁰⁴ Mark Edmundson, ‘Poetry Slam: Or, the decline of American Verse’, *Harper’s Magazine*, 6 July 2013 <<http://harpers.org/archive/2013/07/poetry-slam/>> [accessed 6 July 2016]. Edmundson’s essay has recently been excoriated by the critic Ben Lerner in his 2016 text *The Hatred of Poetry*. Lerner deconstructs Edmundson’s criticism of popular and mainstream contemporary poetics such as performance poetry suggesting that ‘Edmundson lacks a perfect contempt for the actual examples he considers; he confuses the Poem you sing in the dream with the poem you sing by the fire’. Ben Lerner, *The Hatred of Poetry* (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2016), pp.84-85.

¹⁰⁵ Leavis, *Revaluation*, p.32.

¹⁰⁶ Leavis, *Revaluation*, p.31.

capacity to manipulate the orality of the English language, is suited to certain tasks, to certain modes of writing. But for Leavis, these modes do not fall under the purview of fine poetry.¹⁰⁷ The issue presented is the association Leavis makes between Eliot's 'dissociation of sensibility'¹⁰⁸ and a mode of writing suited to the public, which, in Leavis's own examples is notionally characterized by theatricality and by attention to the spoken voice in the composition of the poetic line. The subtext is the intimation that intellect can only be married to the emotional experience as per Eliot's incitement, by a poetry that is aimed away from the public ear: 'Something that might well be covered by the phrase is the development, in the spirit of Waller's 'reform', of a verse that, as was loosely said, appeals only to the public- or, it might be better to say, social- ear'.¹⁰⁹

This is of course a simplification as Leavis turns critical attention against poets, Milton being chief among them, who fail to recognize the importance of the spoken voice in the context of the poem: 'The extreme and consistent remoteness of Milton's medium from any English that was ever spoken is an immediately relevant consideration'.¹¹⁰ In a reactionary move against the Miltonic 'Grand Style'¹¹¹, Leavis argues quite aggressively for the spoken language encoded within

¹⁰⁷ Discussing Dryden's public work Leavis suggests that: 'Dryden's satiric pamphlets were, we can see, magnificently effective for their purpose; and read in the appropriate spirit, they are magnificently effective now. But the appropriate spirit is not that which Pope demands; we are not to strain the inner ear (if the convenient expression may be allowed to pass) as if, behind the immediate effect, there were a fine organization' (Leavis, *Revaluations*, p.32).

¹⁰⁸ T.S. Eliot, 'The Metaphysical Poets', in *Selected Essays*, 3rd ed. (London: Faber & Faber, 1951), pp. 281–91.

¹⁰⁹ Leavis, *Revaluation*, p.33.

¹¹⁰ Leavis, *Revaluation*, p.51.

¹¹¹ See Samuel Johnson's famous apothegm: 'Milton, Madam, was a genius that could cut a Colossus from a rock; but could not carve heads upon cherry- stones' quoted in James Boswell's *The Life of Samuel Johnson* first published in 1791. James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, Volume 4. (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2008), p.305.

poetry: 'subtlety of movement in English verse depends upon the play of the natural sense movement and intonation against the verse structure, and that 'natural,' here, involves a reference more or less direct, to idiomatic speech'.¹¹² Once again, in a now familiar move, Leavis invokes the 'theatricality' of the Shakespearean tradition to justify his denunciation of Milton: 'That is why even in the most lively books of *Paradise Lost* the verse, brilliant as it is, has to the ear that appreciates Shakespeare a wearying deadness about it'.¹¹³ There are, then, no totalizing implications for the manifestation of the spoken word in poetry, the doors to the canon are not closed to the oral, the voiced, embedded at the centre of the poet's craft. However, the problem remains that Leavis singularly fails to offer even the suggestion of performed poetry as a medium worthy of approaching critically without a relationship to the theatre, and to dramatic verse. It is as if the notion of the spoken voice, outside of its contribution to an analysis of text, must be divorced from the business of the literary critic. Presentation of poetry as an oral form, a form to be performed, is undermined by an insistence on the minutiae of the close reading; the critic an arbiter of the written word. Here of course is the distinction between the close reading of the literary text and the performance of the poem. The performance is weighed in relation to its audience, and the audience is an indivisible part of that poem. Leavis, nose firmly buried in the book, disregards the potential emotional valences of a poem that act external to the lines on the page: 'the elucidations of a poet's soul that are not controlled by the literary critic's

¹¹² Leavis, *Revaluation*, p.53.

¹¹³ Leavis, *Revaluation*, p.54.

attention to poetry will hardly, whatever they may be worth, turn out to be concerned wholly, or even mainly, with the soul of the poet'.¹¹⁴

I pass through much of the chronological assessment of the movements of English poetry that constitutes *Revaluation*, to highlight a specific extract from Leavis's brief analysis of the poetry of Algernon Charles Swinburne. Leavis offers a particular line from Swinburne's *Atalanta in Calydon* (1865): 'the brown bright nightingale amorous'¹¹⁵ and suggests that, in selecting 'bright' from a host of adjectives, Swinburne is displaying a tendency to privilege the sound of words over the sense of the line: 'We have here a further justification for calling Swinburne 'verbal'; it is plain that, in his poetry, one word will bring in a train of others less because of meaning than because they begin with the same letter or chime with like sounds'.¹¹⁶ Whether or not it is reasonable to admonish Swinburne for a lazy inattention to the meaning of his poetry, the deployment of the word 'verbal' is, I believe, telling. This kind of critical approach denotes suspicion over the application of the spoken voice.¹¹⁷ Despite the arguments that Leavis makes, which hinge on a criticism of Swinburne's enthusiasm for privileging sound over sense, establishing a frustration with poetry which evoked musicality but which held no serious meaning,

¹¹⁴ Leavis, *Revaluation*, p.242.

¹¹⁵ Algernon Charles Swinburne. *Atalanta in Calydon: A Tragedy* (London: John Camden Hotten, 1866), p.4.

¹¹⁶ Leavis, *Revaluation*, p.240.

¹¹⁷ Leavis is not alone in this mistrust of the musicality of Swinburne's poetry, as the critic Edward Thomas notes in his 1912 text *Algernon Charles Swinburne: A Critical Study*: 'Swinburne has almost no magic felicity of words. He can astonish and melt but seldom thrill, and when he does it is not by any felicity of as it were God-given inevitable words. He has to depend on sound and an atmosphere of words which is now and then concentrated and crystallized into an intensity of effect which is almost magical, perhaps never quite magical. This atmosphere comes from a vocabulary very rich in words connected with objects and sensations and emotions of pleasure and beauty, but used, as I have said, somewhat lightly and even in appearance indiscriminately. No poet could be poorer in brief electric phrases, pictorial, or emotional.' Edward Thomas, *Algernon Charles Swinburne: A Critical Study* (London: M. Secker, 1912), pp.96-97.

it would be imprudent to deny the categorical position behind all literate art and culture that orality occupies. The critic must make concession to the importance of orality as a valuable aspect in the construction of the written line. However, beyond this, especially in an undertaking such as that of *Revaluation*, to shape and posit a definable canon from the hinterland of the history of poetry, the critic must divest himself of a pre-requisite attendance to that which doesn't necessarily fit. For Leavis, the unsatisfactory poet has failed to attend to meaning as sharply as to the oral qualities or the mellifluousness of the poem. This is of course forbidden, the poet is denounced (as in the above case) as 'verbal' and suspicion of the motives of the poet is established.

This is one model of poetry, a model limited in scope, by certain inhibitions that frustrate an open welcome of performance as a mode of critically thinking about and talking about poetry. It is of course paramount to recognize that although the sedimentation of a Western literary canon that underrepresents performance problematizes critical response, there have been developments that privilege interest in performance, though often tied implicitly to developments in oral theory.¹¹⁸ In his 1972 article *Modernism and Postmodernism: Approaching the Present in American Poetry*, David Antin posed the notion that the speech act has overwhelming poetic potential: 'Poetry is made by a man up on his feet, talking'.¹¹⁹ Shifting the admittedly problematic gendering of this statement to one side there is

¹¹⁸ See, for example: John Miles Foley, *Oral Tradition in Literature: Interpretation in Context* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986).

¹¹⁹ David Antin. 'Modernism and Postmodernism: Approaching the Present in American Poetry' in *boundary 2*, Volume 1. Issue 1 (1972), 98-133 (p.131).

patently a representation of the business of poetry that firmly privileges practice through performance.

This conspicuous reluctance to attend to the performance aspects and practices of poetics is a tacit correlative of Leavis's general disdain for the theatre. *Revaluation* offers evidence of this in his repeated attempts to disengage from a discussion of the relationship between poetry and theatre past a recognition of their contiguity. Michael Bell observes in his chapter in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism* entitled 'F.R. Leavis': '[Leavis's] well known indifference to theatre, and his hostility to the histrionic character as he saw it in Joyce, Yeats, or Shakespeare's Othello arise from a related concern for inwardness and authenticity of response'.¹²⁰ As an explication for this stance, Bell offers the following:

Criticism and interpretation, for Leavis, are subsumed into a sensitive reading. And the compelling image here is the theatrical performance of a dramatic text. But while Leavis's reading is enactive, it is not histrionically projected. It is essentially his reading in the mind. He seeks to let us share an exemplary reading in which the functions of director, actor, and audience are all aspects of an imaginary re-enactment within a single consciousness. There is thus a tension between Leavisian reading and theatre proper, and the collaborative and vicarious nature of theatre must surely have been part of his unease with it. The problem with

¹²⁰ Michael Bell, 'F.R. Leavis', in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism; Volume VII Modernism and the New Criticism*, ed. by A. Walton Litz, Louis Menand, and Lawrence Rainey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.389-423 (p.419).

theatre is that, as an act of reading, it is not only vicarious, it is literally directed by someone else.¹²¹

Whether the 'histrionic' projection of theatre is a reliable value judgement when extended to poetic performance is a larger and more ponderous question. What is immediately clear however is that Leavis's disregard for this aspect of the relation of poetry is a result of personal suspicions about the reason behind the work. Bell concludes that an inward reluctance to collaborate in the performance of a poem or a dramatic piece was a result of Leavis's extreme antithesis toward 'the corruption of critical and artistic values by those of class and careerism'¹²² a feature of the English academy which Leavis came to see as endemic later in his career. The spoken voice is critically absent from Leavis's study as it offers an unregulated medium, one which threatens the closed space of a Leavisian critical approach – opening the poem to the threat of manipulation. Though Leavis's interests were directed towards the creative sincerity of the artist he was 'entirely committed to an inductive reading whereby all significance is found within the text'.¹²³

This highly controlled structure of reading addresses a fundamental aspect of Leavis's close engagement with New Criticism. The formalist New Critical movement, which took its name from John Crowe Ransom's 1941 text *The New Criticism*¹²⁴, was particularly dominant in the US academy during the 1940s and 1950s. It must be stressed that Leavisian criticism cannot be considered directly equivalent to New Criticism, with some critics highlighting Leavis's detachment from the notion of

¹²¹ Bell, p.419.

¹²² Bell, p.419.

¹²³ Bell, p.404.

¹²⁴ John Crowe Ransom, *The New Criticism* (Norfolk, Conn: New Directions, 1941).

established critical approaches altogether.¹²⁵ However, there are certainly distinct contiguities to be found in a mutual, close critical focus on the text which has led to a firm association being drawn between Leavis and the New Critical movement. As Raman Selden writes in *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, Leavis became 'the major single target for the New Critical theory of the 1970s and beyond'.¹²⁶ Whether Leavis's critical approach specifically, or the New Critical mode in general, the revolution in literary criticism attended by the propagation of similar techniques of close reading came under significant scrutiny from figures such as Helen Gardner, C.S. Lewis, Paul de Man, and Graham Hough, arguing that such criticism threatened to be prescriptive.¹²⁷ As Wallace Martin argues in his essay 'Criticism and the academy' under this model the critic ran the risk of 'trying to do the reader's reading for him'.¹²⁸

The advent of New Criticism within the academy in the middle decades of the twentieth century is of paramount importance to the development of the oeuvre of Modernist poetics, and the role of performance therein. As stated, Leavis is by no means an exact analogue for New Criticism, nor indeed the sole exemplar of a similar

¹²⁵ The critic G. Singh argues that 'Terms such as "close criticism," "practical criticism," "new criticism," meant nothing more and nothing less to Leavis than criticism in practice-criticism achieved through analytical subtlety, delicacy and perceptiveness while reading a poem or a novel'. G. Singh, 'The Achievement of F. R. Leavis', in *Modern Age*, Volume 40. Issue 4 (1998), pp.397-405 (p.398).

¹²⁶ Raman Selden, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (London: Prentice Hall, 1997) p.23.

¹²⁷ See: Helen Gardner, *In Defence Of The Imagination* (Cambridge (Massachusetts): Harvard University Press, 1982); C.S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961); Paul de Man, 'Form and Intent in the American New Criticism', in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism: Second Edition* (London: Routledge, 1983), pp.20-36; Graham Hough, *An Essay on Criticism* (London: Duckworth, 1966) respectively.

¹²⁸ Wallace Martin. 'Criticism and the academy', in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism; Volume VII Modernism and the New Criticism*, ed. by A. Walton Litz, Louis Menand, Lawrence Rainey, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p.312.

critical approach.¹²⁹ However, his critical perspective, and the importance of his canonizing 'Great Tradition' to the development of the British academy is incontrovertible.¹³⁰ This period also saw the critic afforded new responsibilities: 'Given the difficulties that modernism presents to readers, the critic's task is to posit principles that will make texts accessible. It involves poetic interpretation, as well as evaluation and clarification of the bearing that modernist content has on modern life'.¹³¹ The awakening of New Criticism as a university discipline, and its subsequent period of hegemony in the academy was a response to the narrowness of vision perceived as a flaw in the traditional critical approach: 'The refusal of the professoriate to admit that its purportedly factual scholarship and critical impressionism were based on unacknowledged ideological commitments was what proved so irritating to its critics – then as now'.¹³² New Criticism was a tool to examine the self-contained, self-referential body of the text, without the bias of a historiographical or a philological methodology, intent on categorizing, enabling a derivative progression of literary study. Leavis's alignment with New Criticism is mediated by a joint obsession with close reading, and with the aesthetic experience of the poetry as experiences in and of themselves, without a prerequisite recognition of the history and the traditions that shaped the context of the writing. The development of a critical study of Modernist poetics paralleled the development of New Criticism in the academy. By the time that institutions were focusing on

¹²⁹ For further prominent Anglo-American New Criticism see: William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1930); Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, *Understanding Poetry* (New York: H. Holt and Co, 1938).

¹³⁰ For a measured, yet ultimately persuasive account of Leavis' importance see: Ian Gregor, 'F.R. Leavis and "The Great Tradition"', in *The Sewanee Review*, Volume 93. Issue 3 (1985), pp.434-446.

¹³¹ Martin, p.294.

¹³² Martin, p.290.

Modernist criticism as a dominant critical discourse, the orthodoxy of the New Critical approach was underway. Martin argues that this contiguity was a natural development:

Although the complexity of much modern poetry makes it understandable that courses in the subject should have emphasized poetics and interpretation, this emphasis also gave professors something to teach. Simple lyrics that require no biographical or historical commentary leave all but the subtlest readers with little to say.¹³³

The freedom and the progression that Modernism engendered offered much needed reinforcement to the representation of spoken voice and performance in poetry.¹³⁴ However, its tentative alliance with this new mode of critical attention was not necessarily the productive relationship that it appeared to be. In his essay 'The critic and society, 1900-1950' Morris Dickstein highlights a distinction between Modernism's principles, and the intended products of New Criticism as a methodological approach to unpacking a text: 'The New Criticism built an exegetical bridge between the modern writers and their rejected audience, but it did so at the expense of some larger, less instructional aims of criticism'.¹³⁵ Dickstein elucidates this shift by drawing attention to the critical work of American scholar F.O.

¹³³ Martin, p.303.

¹³⁴ For example, see: Harvey Gross and Robert McDowell, *Sound and Form in Modern Poetry: Second Edition* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996).

¹³⁵ Morris Dickstein, 'The critic and society, 1900-1950', in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism; Volume VII Modernism and the New Criticism*, ed. by A. Walton Litz, Louis Menand, Lawrence Rainey, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.324.

Matthiessen, who, by 1949, had reached a point of disenchantment with what he perceived as the dogmatism of the close reading approach:

As we watch our generation producing whole anthologies of criticism devoted to single contemporary authors and more and more detailed books of criticism of criticism, we should realize that we have come to the unnatural point where textual analysis seems to be an end in itself.¹³⁶

The conclusion regarding New Criticism which Dickstein drew from Matthiessen's last major essay *The Responsibilities of the Critic* (1949) before the latter's suicide in 1950 was that 'A movement that had come to challenge the old indiscriminating journalism, caught up entirely in the hubbub of the present, and the old historical scholarship, which left the writers of the past safely immured in the past, had itself become pedantic, mechanical, predictable'.¹³⁷ Matthiessen's influence on studies of Modernism in the US is of critical importance when posited alongside the contributions made by Leavis in the UK.¹³⁸ Indeed, the parallels between Leavis's position in relation to the UK canon and Matthiessen's exercises in the US are further concretized when we consider that, as Leavis had done for UK criticism, Matthiessen's influence on the direction of critical attention in the US academy remained substantial for a significant period. From the late 1930s to 1940s,

¹³⁶ Matthiessen, 'The Responsibilities of the Critic', p.284.

¹³⁷ Dickstein, p.323.

¹³⁸ As Dickstein contends: '[Matthiessen] not only set up a pantheon of a few select writers, as Leavis did in England, but offered a method by which they could be closely read – a canon and a method that proved remarkably in tune with the literature and criticism of the post-war era' (Dickstein, p.349).

Matthiessen, and later the aligned critical theories of Lionel Trilling, defined the academic syllabus in the US for over three decades.¹³⁹

Despite their contemporaneity, the formalist contention articulated in Matthiessen's critical work is, I believe, a radical departure from the Leavisian close reading and the orthodoxy of New Critical approaches. A natural dissonance in the apparent fellowship of Modernism and a New Critical approach was that by eschewing a holistic knowledge of literary tradition New Critics were left ill-prepared for the predilection of Modernist writers to rely upon this knowledge. Martin furthers this argument:

One paradoxical result of the emphasis on recent literature in the curriculum, at the expense of courses in earlier periods, was that it created a situation in which modernism was scarcely intelligible to students: an attempt to explain the allusions that puzzle them in Pound and Eliot becomes a pointless effort to reconstruct the entire literary tradition in brief. Desperate remedies, such as courses in world literature, the Bible, and the epic, merely add to the randomness of a curriculum already replete with attractive alternatives.¹⁴⁰

Modernist poetry could be opaque precisely because it frequently cited a specific literary tradition. It did so as oblique allusion or intertextuality, positioning itself as a participant in the continuation of a literary tradition, for which an encompassing awareness of said tradition was a prerequisite for understanding. A lack of

¹³⁹ See particularly: Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (New York: Viking Press, 1950).

¹⁴⁰ Martin, p.316.

cognizance with the hypotext necessarily renders the hypertext to a greater degree inscrutable.¹⁴¹ The conclusion I contend is that the New Critical approach to literary studies was not the most suitable tool to use when analysing Modernist literature.

The proposition that Matthiessen may present an American alternative to Leavis's formalization of a canon in the UK may understandably come in for similar criticism, however the distinction lies in the significant rise of a new critical area: American Studies.¹⁴² Fed in part by dissatisfaction evident in the UK academies between New Criticism and the traditional mode, American Studies was: 'an effort to overcome the hardening of disciplinary boundaries of literature and history and to see American culture as an organic whole'.¹⁴³ Matthiessen was one of a number of critics who fostered this effort. American Studies also owes its successes to critics such as Vernon Louis Parrington, and Constance Rourke¹⁴⁴, however Matthiessen proved the greater influence due in part to his flexibility and his ability to adapt to, or exceed the limits of New Criticism. One can see in Matthiessen a hybridization of formalist close reading and the less dogmatic aspects of biographical and critical attention, as Dickstein comments:

¹⁴¹ The terms hypotext and hypertext refer to Gerard Genette's definition, which articulates a temporal relationship between two bodies of work: 'any relationship uniting a text B (hypertext) to an earlier text A (hypotext), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary', Gerard Genette. *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*. (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), p.5.

¹⁴² For further analysis of the development of American Studies as a discipline see: Winfried Fluck and Thomas Claviez, *Theories of American Culture; Theories of American Studies* (Tübingen: G. Narr, 2003).

¹⁴³ Dickstein, p.347.

¹⁴⁴ For more information, see: Vernon Louis Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought: The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America, 1860-1920 Vol. III* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987) and Constance Rourke, *The Roots of American Culture*, ed. by Van Wyck Brooks (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1942).

To a remarkable degree, Matthiessen created American literature as a subject for academic study. He did this by establishing the formal complexity and tragic seriousness of a few key writers in a way that appealed to the age of modernism – which was also an era of mass instruction, when the journalist critic and the ‘common reader’ were giving way to the academic expert and his classroom charges. Unlike some who followed him, Matthiessen had an extraordinary depth of feeling for the writers he discussed.¹⁴⁵

Matthiessen’s focus on both close reading (‘It will be interesting, therefore, to begin by seeing how much we can learn about Whitman just by examining his diction’¹⁴⁶) and his investment in the context of literature situated outside the text (‘The first awareness for the critic should be of the works of art of our own time. This applies even if he is not primarily a critic of modern literature’¹⁴⁷) provided a much more suitable tool to balance the catalogue of critical issues surrounding the appreciation of Modernist literature.

The difference between Leavis and Matthiessen and their respective roles in shaping an academic canon alongside developments of Modernist poetics can be summarized quite simply. The dissonance between the New Critical or Leavisian methods and the complexities of a Modernist aesthetic which relied heavily on the cognizance of a literary tradition was negotiated more skilfully in the US than in the UK. During this period of complex, contrasting and contradicting critical

¹⁴⁵ Dickstein, p.351.

¹⁴⁶ F.O. Matthiessen. *American Renaissance; Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman - Book 4: Whitman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941), p.1.

¹⁴⁷ Matthiessen, *Responsibilities of the Critic*, p.285.

methodologies, Matthiessen proved a better guide. Modernism's natural correlatives evidenced the problematic issue evident in Leavis's reluctance to adapt in the same way Matthiessen had: 'by the end of the sixties, the increasing dominance of Marxist analysis, the impact of feminist and minority ethnic writing, and the globalising of literary influence and creation, all made Leavis's methods and concerns seem outdated and parochial'.¹⁴⁸ Leavis's professional isolation in later life, and his pronounced turn against Modernism - 'As a critic of Modernity, Leavis gave voice to a deep, almost visceral, loathing'¹⁴⁹ - may be evidence of a frustration that the rapidly changing face of literary material would not fit with Leavis's stringent approach to criticism and canonization.

Aligned with the idea of a guiding hand directing critical attention where New Criticism and Modernism bisects, the development of performance poetics can perhaps be reconsidered. I contend that the development of performance poetry in the US, from both an academic and a popular perspective was heavily influenced by this formative period of critical re-examination. Rather than mediating critical attention through the apparatus of the close reading (exclusive to words on the page) Matthiessen and American Studies offered a contextual understanding of the oral traditions of poetry in performance. By contrast, the close reading invited only the privacy of the reader and the text, where anything external to that dynamic was essentially uninvited. Ultimately, the contemporary predilection to provide a platform for performance in the US far above any similar opportunities available in

¹⁴⁸ Bell, p.420.

¹⁴⁹ Bell, p.421.

the UK may very well have its roots in the conditions fostered by different critical approaches in the mid-twentieth century.

Performance poetry in the contemporary UK academy

To support my analysis of the current paucity of performance poetry in UK academia my research has led me to investigate the small number of academic institutions where spoken word is explicitly included on the syllabus.¹⁵⁰ Throughout my investigation the majority of instances of UK spoken word pedagogy I encountered were English or Theatre departments noting performance poetry in passing on syllabi for creative writing modules. Concerted study of performance poetry, or of modules developed to explore performance practice, even alongside text-based study, was conspicuously absent. Leeds Beckett University's BA (Hons) English with Creative Writing course webpage stated that a core module ran entitled Poems: Page & Performance. However, on contacting the module convener, Dr. Lucy Burnett (an academic with a background in spoken word)¹⁵¹ I was informed that the module titles

¹⁵⁰ It should be noted here that my investigation focuses on the provision of performance poetry pedagogy within the academy. However, there are a number of institutions outside of Higher Education offering courses providing support, guidance, and practical advice for writing for the stage. See for example, The Roundhouse Poetry Collective: 'A collective of young writers and performers who meet weekly to create, experiment and develop, under guidance from established and celebrated poets'. Roundhouse, 'Roundhouse Poetry Collective', (2016) <<http://www.roundhouse.org.uk/young-creatives/autumn-2016/roundhouse-poetry-collective/>> [accessed 19 August 2016].

¹⁵¹ Scottish Poetry Library, 'Lucy Burnett (b.1975)', (2016) <<http://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poetry/poets/lucy-burnett>> [accessed 06 July 2016].

were only proposed titles, and that the particular module had been retitled: Writing Poetry: Voice & Audience.¹⁵² Dr. Burnett explained that: 'The module will involve a small amount of consideration of performance poetry but only as a small component within a broader context'.¹⁵³

Although studies in HE of performance poetry within wider contexts certainly gestures towards a recognition of performance poetics in the UK I contend that performance poetics as an aesthetic and conceptual medium deserves a more established academic platform. During my research I hoped to discover a more rigorous pedagogical framework exploring performance poetry in a fuller capacity. To this end, my research yielded two particular case studies: Bath Spa University's BA (Hons) Creative Writing, which offers an optional module entitled Performance Poetry¹⁵⁴, and Goldsmith's Spoken Word Educator training programme offered as an element of its MA Writer/Teacher provision.¹⁵⁵ Focusing my analysis initially upon Bath Spa University's Performance Poetry module, on contacting the module convener Dr. Lucy English I discovered that alongside her teaching and her position as an RLF consultant, she was appointed to the board of governors for Apples and Snakes in 2012, one of the largest spoken word collectives in the UK. I interviewed English about her teaching practices and the emphasis she places on spoken word, pursuing the development of performance poetry practice in the UK academy. I

¹⁵² Leeds Beckett University, 'BA (Hons) English with Creative Writing', (2016) <<http://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/englishwithcreativewriting/>> [accessed 15 May 2015].

¹⁵³ Lucy Burnett, interviewed by Jack McGowan, 22 May 2015.

¹⁵⁴ Bath Spa University, 'Performance Poetry at Bath Spa University', (2016) <<http://www.bathspa.ac.uk/schools/humanities-and-cultural-industries/creative-writing-at-bath-spa-university/poetry/performance-poetry>> [accessed 17 June 2016].

¹⁵⁵ Goldsmiths University of London, 'MA Writer/Teacher' (2016) <<http://www.gold.ac.uk/pg/ma-writer-teacher/>> [accessed 20 June 2016].

present an explanation of the module as offered by English in order to provide a comparative frame of reference:

The module runs throughout the whole year and has a bi-weekly timetable. In week one we look at some of the current influences on spoken word poetry in the UK, starting with the bardic tradition and moving forward in time. In the second week we workshop student writing which has been inspired by the topic of that week. In the workshops we assess work in terms of performance quality, quality of writing, and relationship with the audience. Students have four items of assessment, a critical study of a poet, a review of events they have attended, a folder of creative writing and a live performance. All items are worth 20% of the final mark.¹⁵⁶

The inclusion of a weighted, qualitatively assessed element of performance practice within the module structure raises questions over the complications of providing a frame of reference to assess performance in an academic context. When queried whether the lack of a defined structure for qualitative assessment (such as the industry surrounding publication) prevented performance poetry from securing a place within the academy English responded:

I get fed up with the academy resistance to performance poetry! There are already plenty of models for assessing spoken word poems that can be adapted from other art forms, such as theatre, drama and even dance.

¹⁵⁶ Lucy English, interviewed by Jack McGowan, 24 August 2015.

I have drawn up a set of marking criteria for the module that I would be willing to share with you, if you want. I am adamant that quality of writing is as important as quality of delivery. The academy tends to regard performance poetry as a lesser form of poetry, which is a shame. I have also noted that many so called 'page' poets are now adopting techniques used by the spoken word posse.¹⁵⁷

Certainly the presence of a set of assessment criteria is an attractive prospect in my own development of a more rigorous platform for spoken word pedagogy, however it also impinges on the potential necessity to address changes to the academy through a loosening of the reliance upon such structures (or a different approach altogether which might perhaps combine the two). In response to my enquiries regarding the level of experience or familiarity students demonstrated with spoken word (particularly in more recent cohorts) English explained that:

I usually have a mixture of students who have seen or been exposed to plenty of performance poetry both live and via Youtube and others who have less experience of it. This can vary from year to year. We have an energetic spoken word scene amongst the students with an open mic night once a month on campus and one in Bath. There are also plenty of opportunities to see live poetry in the Bristol/Bath area. We also run 'traditional' poetry modules so students who don't like performance would not choose my module.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ English, interviewed by Jack McGowan.

¹⁵⁸ English, interviewed by Jack McGowan.

The invocation of traditional poetry (the familiar page and stage binary) invites a discussion of the utility of drawing the two apart in an academic context in particular. English stated that in her experience 'Some students find the process of performing, rather than 'reading' their work more challenging than others'.¹⁵⁹ The suggestion was that a tacit relationship between the page and a more conventional sense of the reading (out loud) of poetry was distinct from the performance of poetry, under the category of performance poetry, or spoken word. When questioned whether she thought that the distinction between page and stage poetry was helpful or unhelpful in her performance poetry pedagogy English responded:

The way I present it to the students is that there are different audiences with different expectations. A 'page' audience does not expect poets to jump about, but a poetry 'reading' can be killed dead by bad delivery. Stage poetry is also a piece of writing. It is not just funny faces and gestures. I expect my students to pay as much attention to the writing of their poems as they do to the performance of them.¹⁶⁰

What is particularly cogent in English's outline of her approach to performance pedagogy is the notion of expectation, which forms a correlative with her later point about the equal weighting of writing and performance on her module. One could easily imagine that the expectations of different audiences are aligned with notions which relate to the high versus low art binary. The weighting of performance as equal

¹⁵⁹ English, interviewed by Jack McGowan.

¹⁶⁰ English, interviewed by Jack McGowan.

to the qualitative condition of the writing encourages value to be found in both. This of course alludes to the central question in an exploration of the place of performance poetry within the academy: can performance poetry be considered valuable. When asked whether she thought changes in the way society receives poetry (such as a move towards spoken word) needed to be reflected in the way poetry is taught, English affirmed: 'Yes, I do think this. The speaking aloud of poetry is not new. Chaucer! Damn it, poetry is meant to be heard as well as read!'.¹⁶¹

Of course, the potential complication of establishing such a page stage binary around the notion of a 'traditional poetry module' invites a dangerous conflation of tradition and reading from the page. There are certainly examples where poetry is read aloud in the context of traditional academic study. In his text *Distant Reading* (2005) the critic Peter Middleton cites a number of occasions where the poetry reading played an important part of university life in the UK both inside and outside the classroom.¹⁶² Indeed, the value of spoken word has been recognized in a number of academic contexts, including as a teaching aid in foreign language classes, or re-interpreting the page canon.¹⁶³ However, the argument English articulates does not attempt to suggest that the reading aloud of poetry is exclusively a feature of performance poetry pedagogies, but to bring performance to prominence as an object of study. This point bears a distinct similarity to the practice and ethos of

¹⁶¹ English, interviewed by Jack McGowan.

¹⁶² In particular see sections from chapter 3 'A History of the Poetry Reading': Peter Middleton, *Distant Reading: Performance, Readership, and Consumption in Contemporary Poetry*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005), pp.92-103).

¹⁶³ See Catherine Mason. 'Oral Poetry in the Foreign Language Classroom', in *The Journal of Oral Tradition*, Volume 18. Issue 1 (2003), pp.127-129, and Willi Erzgräber. 'The Narrative Presentation of Orality in James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*', in *The Journal of Oral Tradition*, Volume 7. Issue 1 (1992), pp.150-170 respectively.

Goldsmith's Spoken Word Educator training programme. In his October 2013 article for the Guardian entitled 'The rise of spoken word educators in UK schools'¹⁶⁴ the poet and spoken word educator Jacob Sam-La Rose claimed that until September of that year there was perhaps only one spoken word educator in the world: Peter Khan. Sam-La Rose encourages his reader 'not to forget the [spoken word] workshops run by a range of individual teaching poets in schools, PRUs and other educational institutions across the country' but establishes an important distinction through the role of 'spoken word educator'.¹⁶⁵ This distinction separates the pedagogy of the spoken word educator from the virtues of simply including spoken word and poetry readings within a more page-based pedagogy. The particular role he refers to is a position offered through Goldsmith's Spoken Word Educator training programme established by Khan in 2012, which now employs Sam-La Rose as a programme director. Sam-La Rose articulates the benefits of the programme stating that:

Each spoken word educator is both a practising poet skilled in the writing and performance of poetry, and a trained educator with their own body of lessons, resources and pedagogical strategies. As educators, they're valid members of staff, aware of what does and doesn't work in a classroom, able to work in a range of different lessons on the timetable, even beyond English and drama, and challenge the perception that poetry is an exclusive pursuit. As embedded poets, they're recognised as active practitioners of the craft they're imparting, they can focus

¹⁶⁴ Jacob Sam-La Rose. 'The rise of spoken word educators in UK schools', *The Guardian Online*, 3 October 2013 <<https://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/teacher-blog/2013/oct/03/spoken-word-educators-poetry-schools>> [accessed 03 December 2014].

¹⁶⁵ Sam-La Rose, 'The rise of spoken word educators'.

completely on their students' needs and are less susceptible to the range of other drains on a teacher's time.¹⁶⁶

Khan himself, who was interviewed in 2014 by Stephanie Lane Sutton in the *Chicago Literati* (Chicago being the location of Khan's first Spoken Word Educator initiative, and the birthplace of Slam poetry) states that:

Research on Expressive Writing points to the emotional and physical benefits of writing personal narratives. Teaching the craft of poetry writing and performance develops a variety of 'transferable skills,' from written literacy, oral literacy, analytical skills and social-emotional literacy. It also builds self-confidence and academic engagement, thus building hope and academic investment.¹⁶⁷

Discussing secondary education, Sam-La Rose notes the missed opportunities of the pedagogical framework which employs spoken word poets for one-off experiences, with poets 'arriving as if by magic at the start of a school day and often disappearing as quickly'.¹⁶⁸ He further articulates the potential of longer term projects, offering more robust experiential practice:

If a one-off or short term intervention can have a life-changing impact on a student, what would the potential benefits of a sustained, long-term commitment look like? How much more impactful could those

¹⁶⁶ Sam-La Rose, 'The rise of spoken word educators'.

¹⁶⁷ Stephanie Lane Sutton, 'Poetry in Perilous Times: Peter Khan & the gravity of young voices', *Chicago Literati*, 5 June 2014 <<https://chicagoliterati.com/2014/06/05/poetry-in-perilous-times-peter-kahn-the-gravity-of-young-voices/>> [accessed 03 December 2014].

¹⁶⁸ Sam-La Rose, 'The rise of spoken word educators'.

experiences be if embedded in a larger number of student's school careers?¹⁶⁹

I contend that in this concentrated aspect the value of performance poetry pedagogy is made clear. Certainly the 'traditional' methods of teaching poetry which English referred to may include elements of performance. However, it is the kind of distinct, long-term study which English, Sam-La Rose, and Khan operate - a concerted experience of performance poetry pedagogy - which I believe requires further development in the contemporary UK academy.¹⁷⁰

Community and Elitism in contemporary poetics

Though the above case studies offer a suggestive movement towards the study of performance poetry within various strata of education there still remained and remains a lack of critical and public attention to performance poetry and spoken word. As the critic Dana Gioia observes:

Without doubt the most surprising and significant development in recent American poetry has been the wide-scale and unexpected re-

¹⁶⁹ Sam-La Rose, 'The rise of spoken word educators'.

¹⁷⁰ Of note; the success of the Spoken Word Educators project in secondary schools announces a clear precedent for bringing performance poetry pedagogy firmly into the wheelhouse of tertiary / higher education. As evidenced by the following 2013 article from the online platform *Student Voice*, there is certainly a framework to build upon: *Student Voice* [online], 'UK's first full-time poetry Spoken Word Educators embedded in schools from September', White Fuse Media, 9 September 2013 <<http://studentvoice.co.uk/news/uk%E2%80%99s-first-full-time-poetry-spoken-word-educators-embedded-schools-september>> [accessed 12 June 2015].

emergence of popular poetry – namely rap, cowboy poetry, poetry slams, and certain overtly accessible types of what was once a defiantly avant-garde genre, performance poetry. These new forms of popular verse have seemingly come out of nowhere to become significant forces in American culture... And all these new poetic forms have thrived without the support of the university or the literary establishment.¹⁷¹

Gioia refers not only to the potential of these new forms but the lack of anticipation regarding their success: 'In a literary culture that during most of the twentieth century declared verse a dying technique, no one would have predicted this vastly popular revival... verse has changed into a growth industry, though its rehabilitation has happened mostly off the printed page'.¹⁷² Gioia exhibits a reticence to declare the value of these forms - 'Please note that while admiring the energy of the revival, I do not maintain that these new forms of popular verse represent the best new poetry of the period' - however he acknowledges their importance in a shifting poetic landscape: 'Collectively, however, the work has enormous implications on the future of poetry. Not only does it call into question many contemporary assumptions about the current state of poetry, but the new popular poetry also reflects the broad cultural forces that are now reshaping all the literary arts'.¹⁷³ As for the critics, Gioia discusses the gap between 'high' and 'low' assessments of poetics, suggesting that:

¹⁷¹ Dana Gioia, *Disappearing Ink: Poetry at the End of Print Culture* (Saint Paul: Graywolf Press, 2004) pp.6-7.

¹⁷² Gioia, *Disappearing Ink*, p.7.

¹⁷³ Gioia, *Disappearing Ink*, p.7.

While the new popular poetry has received immense coverage from the electronic media and general press, it has garnered relatively little attention from intellectuals and virtually none from established poetry critics. One can understand the reluctance of academic critics. If they have noticed the new poetry at all, they immediately see how little it has in common with the kinds of poetry they have been trained to consider worthy of study. It does not grow out of the long-esteemed and meticulously studied high-art traditions of Classicism, Romanticism, Modernism, or Post-Modernism that informs most literary scholarship. In fact, in general it hardly seems to connect to any conventional academic notion of literary poetry.¹⁷⁴

Identifying what exactly Gioia's 'literary poetry' constitutes, and how this type of poetry compares to contemporary performance poetics is a necessary next step. A prominent poetic of the 1960s (especially in America) was Imagist poetry, intent on delivering an unmediated, authentic moment.¹⁷⁵ The effect Robert Lowell describes as 'the grace of accuracy'¹⁷⁶ is derived from a conception of the poem as an act of witnessing. However, as Marjorie Perloff notes in her text *Radical Artifice* (1991), this witness is always starkly detached: 'The observer remains outside the picture frame[...], a seemingly impassive observer, even as everything that is seen and felt is filtered through his consciousness'.¹⁷⁷ Though this kind of deep image

¹⁷⁴ Gioia, *Disappearing Ink*, pp.7-8.

¹⁷⁵ For further analysis of the importance of the Imagist movement in the latter half of the twentieth century see John Gery, Daniel Kempton, and H. R Stoneback. *Imagism: Essays on Initiation, Impact and Influence*. (New Orleans: University of New Orleans Press, 2013).

¹⁷⁶ Robert Lowell, *Epilogue – Day by Day* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1977) p.127.

¹⁷⁷ Perloff, *Radical Artifice*, p.21.

poem is performative in the sense that it offers a scene, and apports the reader the role of 'audience', it also denies the intimacy of the performance as a shared space for mutual and communal understanding. Perloff argues quite convincingly that "Perfect' as such small 'deep image' poems are, they are also oddly unambitious'.¹⁷⁸ She ascribes this lack of ambition to a fear of confronting larger degrees of experience, and a reluctance to consider 'the implications of using what has become a fairly standard free-verse form (a set of short, irregular lines surrounded by white space) and a fixed subject position in a world that increasingly questions the validity of such conventions'.¹⁷⁹ What one anticipates in performance poetry is precisely not to be limited by the experiential structure but to interrogate it for its value and for its authenticity. Rather than the fixed subject position, the performance poem is an interlocution, a question, not an answer. The performance itself anticipates a communal response, inviting the audience to react without expecting a prescribed reply. Even a sceptical audience may become a community when faced with the prospect of a collaborative response. The distinction that may be drawn between much 'naturally voiced' Modernist poetics, not just Imagist poetry, and performance poetry is the desire to actually achieve a unity between poetry and its audience: 'the glut, for example, of 'aspirational' writing... can be overcome, not by finding books in the library that will talk about community, but by ways to actually have it happen'.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Perloff, *Radical Artifice*, p.21.

¹⁷⁹ Perloff, *Radical Artifice*, p.21.

¹⁸⁰ Perloff, *Radical Artifice*, p.26.

Perloff's critical corpus invests heavily in an examination of what can be contained within a broad notion of post-modern art and aesthetics.¹⁸¹ As such, inviting discussion of Perloff necessitates a discussion of a post-modern aesthetic that accepts various public media (the billboard and advertisements, the logos, the jingles, the theme tunes) as art, which in turn compels an acknowledgment that performance poetry maintains a complicit association with such avant-gardism, equated as it is with the soap box.¹⁸² A published poem may move thousands, but rarely more than one at a time, a performance poem may move thousands at the same time. This association with publicity and with distribution is an association with a changing, technologizing world. Perloff, borrowing from Charles Bernstein's essay¹⁸³ on the challenges post-modernism poses to the traditional values of the academy, offers the following: 'The most cursory survey of contemporary poetics would show that, at least as far as what Charles Bernstein calls 'official verse culture' is concerned, technology, whether computer technology or the video, audio, and print media, remains, quite simply, the enemy, the locus of commodification and reification against which a 'genuine' poetic discourse must react'.¹⁸⁴ The contention Perloff makes shies more towards the business of the

¹⁸¹ See, for example: Marjorie Perloff, *Unoriginal Genius: Poetry by Other Means in the New Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010); or Marjorie Perloff, *Postmodern Genres* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989).

¹⁸² Leavis comments on this aesthetic in his 1933 collection of essays *For Continuity*, stating that: 'When one adds that speech in the old order was a popularly cultivated art, that people talked (so making Shakespeare possible) instead of reading or listening to the wireless, it becomes plain that the promise of regeneration by American slang, popular city idiom, or the invention of transition-cosmopolitans is a flimsy consolation for our loss'. His suggestion is of course that the new, regenerated 'popularly cultivated art' has somewhat depreciated in value: F.R. Leavis. *For Continuity* (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1968), p.217.

¹⁸³ Charles Bernstein, 'The Academy in Peril: William Carlos Williams Meets the MLA', in *A Sulfur Anthology*, Issue 10 ed. by Clayton Eshleman. (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2015), pp.116-121.

¹⁸⁴ Perloff, *Radical Artifice*, p.19.

advertising company or the television soap opera, however I believe that the same defensive moves can be detected in the dismissal of performance poetry as a valid medium for critical study. A reaction against, or a dismissal of performance poetry is an interpolation of the same quality of mass distribution and unmediated public dissemination that 'technologized' media exhibits.¹⁸⁵ However, the communality engendered in the live experience of a performance poem is a means to transform the individual into a community not simply by an impersonal transfer of data down information channels, but by shared communal feeling via a shared experience of affect. The point is certainly argued more eloquently by Perloff:

the very aggressiveness of the new demand for a free-verse and speech-based poetics testifies to a growing anxiety about the viability of the 'natural style' in a world where nature is increasingly subject to the hitherto unimaginable operations of the various 'quiet' revolutions of our time, especially that of the information revolution.¹⁸⁶

It is reasonable to posit that the association between performance as a distribution, the stage as a platform for advertising oneself, and the commodity climate of screen and radio media offers some critics certain grounds for closing the doors to performance. It is also reasonable to posit that the public culture that has developed around performance poetry may be guilty of facilitating ego-boosting and self-aggrandizement. But this is true of any mode, indeed Leavis's treatment of

¹⁸⁵ Valuable discussion of e-poetries and inter-media can be found in: Loss Pequeño Glazier. *Digital Poetics: The Making of E-Poetries* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002); Jerome McGann. *Radiant Textuality: Literature after the World Wide Web* (London: Palgrave, 2001); C.T. Funkhouser. *New Directions in Digital Poetry* (New York and London: Continuum, 2012).

¹⁸⁶ Perloff, *Radical Artifice*, p.34.

Byron throughout his writing offers at times only thinly disguised contempt for what he perceives to be an inferior and misplaced reputation as one of the 'great' poets.¹⁸⁷

Perloff's comments regarding the manifestations of community in the face of quiet revolutions of our time prepare the platform of contemporary poetic discourse. This discourse explores the distinction between a community of poetry and a poetry of the community, a disparity which once again invites questions of 'high' art versus 'popular' art. Though Perloff is an advocate of poetry as a collaborative endeavour, she has been criticized for possessing an elitist filter which demarcates poetic involvement and proposes a hard, evaluated core of contemporary poetics. Her May 2012 *Boston Review* essay 'Poetry on the Brink: Reinventing the Lyric' is foregrounded by an epigraph recalling comments made by poetry critic Jed Rasula offering a cautionary evaluation of the surfeit of US institutions purveying creative writing degrees and qualifications. As an opening gambit in Perloff's subsequent discussion of the current state of poetry and poetics, this appears rather bold. Perloff's first sentence: 'What happens to poetry when everybody is a poet?' is a question which leaves little doubt over her probable response.¹⁸⁸ The article provoked a number of rejoinders from poets and critics, chiefly Matvei Yankelevich's open letter to Perloff: 'The Gray Area', first published in the *Los Angeles Review of Books* in July 2012, and Eileen Myles' 'Painted Clear,

¹⁸⁷ Leavis's comments regarding Byron: 'For success in an Augustan mode there would have to be an easy sureness of diction and tone, a neat precision and poise of movement and gesture, an elegant constancy of point and an even decorum: none of these things can Byron command' (Leavis, *Revaluation*, p.148), are not only somewhat uncharitable but seem to overlook Byron's relative sureness in the Augustan mode considering his social status, his private education in Greek and Latin, and his confidence compared to some of his contemporary Romantics.

¹⁸⁸ Perloff, 'Poetry on the Brink'.

Painted Black', published in May 2013 on *The Volta*, an online multimedia project of poetry, criticism, poetics, video, conversation (audio), and interview (text). Dealing chronologically with these responses, Yankelevich's salvo is ponderous, reducing Perloff's suggestion of a distinction between Conservative and Conceptualist poetics to a binary elitism that ultimately fails to recognize the fertility of a middle ground between the two poles:

What I'm pointing to here is a whole swath of writing between Conceptualism and Conservatism — what I call the gray area, in which, buttressed by home-grown American tendencies and European Modernism, 'traditional' ideas of formal/aesthetic quality are still the background for interesting things (among some not so interesting things) to be happening.¹⁸⁹

Yankelevich accuses Perloff of a false presentation of the contrast between contemporary poets who follow safe and formulaic practice, and those who embrace the new methodologies of Conceptualist practice: 'For [Perloff], Conservatism resists, denies, or forgets 'the word as such,' whereas Conceptualism acknowledges, foregrounds, and celebrates it'.¹⁹⁰ For Yankelevich, however, both fail to address the issue of a reinvented lyric: the binary is established by Perloff in order to enable her elitist conception of contemporary poetics. The correlative is a gross simplification of transparency, categorizing the Conservative as a lesser mode, in favour of the intellectual rigour of Conceptualist poetics. Yankelevich's

¹⁸⁹ Yankelevich, 'The Gray Area'.

¹⁹⁰ Yankelevich, 'The Gray Area'.

accusation contends that this argument is a misconception of the state of poetic practice: 'for both models the materiality of language is of secondary concern'.¹⁹¹ By reconstructing the argument, or rather a deconstruction of this binary, Yankelevich presents the alternative conclusion of a middle ground, a grey area of complex poetry that enables both practices, neutralizing the elitist, hierarchical associations inherent to Perloff's presentation of the structure.

Perloff's riposte 'A Response to Matvei Yankelevich' also published in the *Los Angeles Review of Books* disarms Yankelevich with the simple contention that 'this binary is Yankelevich's, not mine'.¹⁹² She further argues that the alleged transparency associated with both poles is inaccurate. Yankelevich's determination to label poetic models is an unnecessary evocation of a problematic practice of categorization:

perhaps it's time to forget about movements and isms and read carefully particular poets... Whether we call such work Conceptualist or Post-Conceptualist really doesn't matter. The point is to come out openly against the self-regarding sludge that passes for poetry in the commercial and media world, and to look closely at the alternatives.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Yankelevich, 'The Gray Area'.

¹⁹² Marjorie Perloff. 'A Response to Matvei Yankelevich', *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 16 July 2012 <<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/a-response-to-matvei-yankelevich/>> [accessed 19 February 2014].

¹⁹³ Perloff, 'A Response to Matvei Yankelevich'.

Indeed, within Yankelevich's initial attack, there is an overt predilection for generating assumptions based on category. Yankelevich broadly asserts a suspicion regarding the role of performance in Conceptual poetry:

Does the fact that performance (and the development of charismatic personae) plays such a key role in the advancement of these poetic projects suggest anything about the status of the texts themselves, about their dependence on context, or on the charismatic posing of the authors?¹⁹⁴

Yankelevich's discussion of the bisection of performance and Conceptual poetics concludes with a series of rhetorical questions which seem to indicate that he is uncomfortable with his own argument. As tacit as the assumed answers may be, they are not convincing, revealing bias in the incongruity of Yankelevich's treatment of poets with performative inclinations:

Is it that, in the absence of formal indicators, this performance of poet as professional, expert, or entertainer is how the Conceptualist poet marks her or his text as 'poetry'? Is it that, without a public image, Conceptualist poets would not succeed in attaining a desired canonicity or (to put it plainly) popularity?¹⁹⁵

As a response to Perloff's elitist contentions regarding the avant garde in poetics, Yankelevich reveals his own disregard for certain aspects of poetry. Rationalizing Perloff's argument as a binary where neither poles are exemplars of good poetic

¹⁹⁴ Yankelevich, 'The Gray Area'.

¹⁹⁵ Yankelevich, 'The Gray Area'.

practice is not a sufficiently constructed response to the hierarchies of poetry that Perloff suggests. Yankelevich attempts to restate the argument as a question of competing models of poetry, which he then proposes to be flawed, both subject to equal transparency. His solution, the middle ground, a fertile grey area of complexity, occasioned and ascribed to by both Conservative and Conceptual poetic discourse, has been fabricated by Yankelevich. It is subject to his regulation, with errant practice (performance for example) written out.¹⁹⁶ In her reply Perloff dismisses attention to the process of categorizing and evaluating modes and models of poetry, discriminating based on taxonomy, in favour of attention to a critical assessment of the threat presented by homogeneity. Perloff's initial contention in 'Poetry on the Brink: Reinventing the Lyric' is that contemporary poetics operates a marketplace of standardized, unoriginal material:

What makes Rasula's cautionary tale so sobering is that the sheer number of poets now plying their craft inevitably ensures moderation and safety. The national (or even transnational) demand for a certain kind of prize-winning, 'well-crafted' poem—a poem that the New Yorker would see fit to print and that would help its author get one of the

¹⁹⁶ Clearly Yankelevich, as a part of the international poetry scene, is also seeking to avoid firing broadsides at the partisan politics of the poetry world, the kind of argument which Don Cusic is able to offer in his text *The Poet as Performer*: 'politics in poetry are reflected in anthologies of poetry, whose editors are usually academics and who usually publish academic poets, virtually ignoring popular or performing poets. The editors justify their selections by saying they are concerned with the best in terms of literary quality and merit and not popularity. But the result is a definition of literary quality based on the editor's tastes and the politicking of poets/friends, critics and academe in general' (Cusic, p.105).

‘good jobs’ advertised by the Association of Writers & Writing

Programs—has produced an extraordinary uniformity.¹⁹⁷

The elaboration Perloff offers in her response to Yankelevich is that he has made the mistake of translating a criticism of the big tent into a criticism of the small tents:

From his own perspective, as publisher on the downtown New York poetry scene, where a congeries of young experimental poets are producing a great variety of texts — visual poetry, performance texts, serial poems, documentary — that can’t be pigeonholed, he objects to what he takes to be the binary opposition between Conservatism and Conceptualism in my essay.¹⁹⁸

Perloff’s criticism is not aimed at readdressing the specifics of a particular model of poetic practice, nor is it interested in creating a taxonomic model of avant-garde elitism. Perloff is arguing for an avant-garde practice that will destabilize the current trend of reproduction inherent to mainstream poetics.¹⁹⁹ Her arguments are elitist, but they centre on the general tropes that constitute (in her mind) unoriginality, seeking to support a new critical method of identifying these tropes rather than assigning this homogeneity to a particular pre-existing model.

The second major criticism of the elitism inherent to ‘Poetry on the Brink:

Reinventing the Lyric’ is presented by Eileen Myles. Myles’s article, entitled ‘Painted

¹⁹⁷ Perloff, ‘Poetry on the Brink’.

¹⁹⁸ Perloff, ‘A Response to Matvei Yankelevich’.

¹⁹⁹ For similar arguments see Vernon Shetley, ‘The Place of Poetry’, in *The Yale Review*, Volume LXXV. Issue 3 (1986), pp.429-437.

Clear, Painted Black' is in part prompted by explicit reference made by Perloff in her response to Matvei Yankelevich: 'Transparency, even a feigned transparency, can be associated with the Beats and the New York poets: Eileen Myles would be a contemporary case in point'.²⁰⁰ This representation of Myles as a poet of transparency is translated by Myles as commentary on the framework of emotional control inherent in the construction of her poetry: '[Perloff] bothers to declare me to be a contemporary example of 'transparency or feigned transparency' in poetry and I think if what she means is that my front story (unlike hers) is mourning she is absolutely right'.²⁰¹ Transparency and, more directly, quality of emotion is in fact the crux of Myles's response to Perloff. She begins her article: 'I feel like the back story of Marjorie's avant garde mandate is mourning'.²⁰² Myles launches her attack based on the premise that Perloff's avant-garde elitism is framed by her desire to administrate the quality of representative emotions:

I'm feeling wary now because I'm about to be told about the avant garde way of mourning. And we've already learned that avant garde poetry might initially exclude certain people, certain kinds of direct statements, certain bodies and later by means of appropriation, pastiche all of which everyone has been using for decades but now Marjorie tells us that Conceptual poets are really using these tools.²⁰³

²⁰⁰ Perloff, 'A Response to Matvei Yankelevich'.

²⁰¹ Myles, 'Painted Clear, Painted Black'.

²⁰² Myles, 'Painted Clear, Painted Black'.

²⁰³ Myles, 'Painted Clear, Painted Black'.

For Myles (as we might anticipate) this is prohibited. Perloff's elitism is exposed as a dictum of feeling, 'the avant-garde way of mourning'²⁰⁴, which stands in contrast to Myles's conception of poetry:

I think Perloff has sustained an enormous amount of loss in her life and along with her championing of avant garde practice in her criticism she's also deeply engaged in controlling the emotional climate of the room she's in. Who gets to feel what when, and how! And that's a problem because poetry is a community not an institution.²⁰⁵

Myles reveals her hand here. By attacking Perloff, through the epigraph to Perloff's article borrowed from Jed Rasula, Myles insists on an alternative conception of the model of contemporary poetry:

When [Perloff] opens her piece with Jed Rasula's assertion of the problem of there being too many poets I wonder why neither of them notice that in the mainstream there aren't any poets. We're mainly hearing that no poets are being read. That there's no understanding of poetry today[...] The enterprise that all of us take part in is for all intents and purposes absent in public life today.²⁰⁶

Myles's insistence on a poetry absent from the community reveals (in contrast to her arguments that poetry itself is community, not institution) her own avant-garde allegiances. Myles's comments may be read as a call to arms for poetry, an

²⁰⁴ Myles, 'Painted Clear, Painted Black'.

²⁰⁵ Myles, 'Painted Clear, Painted Black'.

²⁰⁶ Myles, 'Painted Clear, Painted Black'.

insistence on the re-edification of the public and the community. However, when coupled with her objections to Perloff's elitism on the grounds of a faux-orthodoxy of feeling the tacit corollary is that, in Myles's opinion, poetry is precisely not community. For poetry to exist within the community rather than the institution (a confluence of mainstream concepts) it must implicitly express that which can already be felt by everyone, and therefore has no fear of falsification or misconception. However, because Myles posits the reality of a threat posed by Perloff's governance of feeling, she unconditionally places poetry inside the non-universality of the avant-garde, rather than the mainstream or the community.

In this respect, Myles's proposition that Perloff's elitism is accentuated by her belief in a unique understanding of mourning can be read as an attempt to connect Myles's version of the avant-garde (the grounded, affective, humanist aspect of the avant-garde) to Perloff's calculated, theoretical, elitist avant-garde. Myles offers affect, mediated through Perloff's sense of mourning, a universal experience, as a bridge between the two. Myles's arguments represent a cautious attempt to construct a rhetoric which will accommodate both senses of the avant-garde. Perhaps anticipating the response to potential criticism of her reconstitution of Perloff's avant-garde conditions, Myles presents her own conception of the avant-garde in 'Painted Clear, Painted Black':

To reflect on my own writing I arrived on the scene in New York in my 20s (okay I already wrote a book about this) landing very deliberately in the avant garde where it seemed everyone I met took it upon himself to pass on to me ze avant garde canon as he saw it. There were so many

approaches and rightnesses and because I already came from a doctrinaire catholic background I wasn't so open to learning from some man of my age or older 'the truth.' My avant garde then & now was composed of a shaky imagined grid holding a multiple of approaches.²⁰⁷

For Myles, the avant-garde is an open forum for experimentation, as capacious as it is tolerant. She represents the typical pluralism of an avant-garde which is constructed in opposition to elitist rhetoric, predetermined by a theoretical framework, and dedicated to exclusivism. However, this theoretical pluralism she champions is precisely the critical article which prevents the avant-garde from fulfilling any capacity for genuine universal accessibility. The multiplicity of approaches Myles posits is a construct which denies the poetry of community, presaging its failure before it can begin. In a pluralist structure of poetics, conceptions of poetry as a universally accessible medium must still exist alongside elitist doctrine, to which it is not simply a poor bedfellow, but utterly incapable of defending itself. Myles, who it should be remembered is criticizing Perloff based on her elitist resistance to alternative approaches to poetry, reveals the difficulty of maintaining her pluralism by problematically declaring her rejection of an avant-garde mediated to her by 'some man'.²⁰⁸ In this respect, just as Perloff's elitism problematizes the framework, Myles equally articulates the difficulty of representing the avant-garde as accessible to the universal community.

²⁰⁷ Myles, 'Painted Clear, Painted Black'.

²⁰⁸ Myles, 'Painted Clear, Painted Black'.

The relationship between Perloff's elitism and the arguments articulated by Yankelevich and Myles suggest a conclusion about the current state of the critical place of poetry. As Yankelevich attempts to corral elitist rhetoric into a binary that can be subsequently circumscribed and managed, Perloff's counter arguments present the ultimate failure of such an undertaking. Yankelevich's structure mishandles Perloff's real criticism; the inherency of the unoriginal in all substructures of contemporary poetics, subject only to a critical appraisal of the individual. Perloff's elitism is more enduring. In Myles's argument the consequence of this is explicitly underlined, avant-garde practice is indefatigable. Myles's conclusion can only recapitulate this bind:

The need for feeling in poetry is of utmost importance to Perloff, but what I come away with is that it's the quality of the feelers (meaning whose) that's the thing most important and true. Which is very postmodern, incredibly elitist and certainly transparent to boot.²⁰⁹

Myles may make a case for the universality of her own 'feelers', but as concerted as this may be, she is still compelled to sacrifice true plurality to the status quo, and the status quo dictates that a common and universal poetics is exactly where the avant-garde cannot compromise. Poetry no longer exists in the mainstream or the community. The hegemony of the institution, mediated through the academy, has proselytized a structure of poetics that is inaccessible to the mainstream. The critical mode, directing intellectual study, is the status quo, and has constructed an impossible tension between our capacity for complete creative freedom and our

²⁰⁹ Myles, 'Painted Clear, Painted Black'.

capacity to write a kind of poetry which, by definition, corrupts that creative freedom.

To return to Perloff's comments regarding a poetic community: 'the glut, for example, of 'aspirational' writing... can be overcome, not by finding books in the library that will talk about community, but by ways to actually have it happen'.²¹⁰ Some elaboration is required. Perloff's community may ultimately be constructed around the premise of a body of writers and writing that dispenses with the bad practice framing her impression of the homogenous, unoriginal elements of contemporary poetry. Poets may rail against this edict of elitism, for elitist it certainly is. However, it may well be that no model of contemporary poetics which is prepared to face up to the truth; the unworkability of a pluralist approach, can fail to accede to the dominance of institutional elitism present in the contemporary avant-garde, and in contemporary poetics in general.

As a working proposition, this explicates the complications which construct the division between high and low art. Without framing the dialogue as pre-constructed binaries, which may simplify the picture, the division between the two is characterized by a status quo which prevents a correspondence between what is universal and accessible and what is institutionally accepted. Perloff's desire to reclaim poetics, winnowing out the homogenous and unoriginal in an attempt to recast a structure of poetics that will intelligently reflect the wider community is laudable only in so far as the readership she will accede to. Conversely, a truly pluralist construction of contemporary poetics is doomed to fail precisely because it

²¹⁰ Perloff, *Radical Artifice*, p.26.

must accede to, and incorporate, the current status quo, one which is negotiated by the institution. Both approaches assure a mutual incompatibility.

Perhaps then a solution lies not in reshaping the current, intransigent structure, but by introducing a paradigm shift in the study and appreciation of poetics. The paucity of academic study of performance poetry, negotiated in the critical tendency to relegate performance to the business of theatre studies, might present fertile ground for a re-assessment of the methods delineating critical attention to poetics.

Of course, this is a solution with a number of problematic conditions, chiefly the efficacy of 'paradigm shift' as anything more than a floating signifier for what is already apparent; the necessity for change. What that change constitutes is a question that requires an investigation of how the framework of what is included in the academy is constructed. Recalling Elaine Myles' remark that: 'what I come away with is that it's the quality of the feelers (meaning whose) that's the thing most important and true', the functional principle of selection implies a question of value.²¹¹ Value is the guiding element dictating academic association, the context under which Leavis, New Critics, Perloff, and executives of contemporary academies seek to hierarchize material. In order to assess what is meant by 'value' I propose in the first instance an analysis of the critical theories of the nineteenth-century critic Matthew Arnold.

²¹¹ Myles, 'Painted Clear, Painted Black'.

Matthew Arnold; spoken word and the provincial spirit

It may seem curious to propose an examination of contemporary academic practices with a non-contemporary focal point, especially considering the radical changes the academy has undergone throughout the twentieth century, as presented in my earlier analysis. However, Arnold's influence on literary criticism and theory is vast. In the opening lines of his introduction to Arnold's *Essays Literary and Critical* (1906), G.K. Chesterton claims that 'Our actual obligations to Matthew Arnold are almost beyond expression. His very faults reformed us'.²¹² As the introduction to Matthew Arnold's works in *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature: The Victorian Era* claims, the reach of Arnold's influence remains prominent: 'While few have unanimously agreed with Arnold's pronouncements on literature and society, he has influenced almost every significant English-speaking critic since his time, including T.S. Eliot, F.R. Leavis, Lionel Trilling, and Raymond Williams'.²¹³ Suggestively, both the *Broadview* introduction and Chesterton's remark acknowledge Arnold's faults as well as his influences: if it could be said that Arnold inspired such fervour in his advocates, it must also be recognized that Arnold suffered greatly from his detractors, with criticism focusing particularly on his elitism. It is this elitism (and its attendant relationship to questions of value) which I investigate specifically in reference to his essays exploring the 'establishment', Arnold's expression for the wider set of cultural institutions of

²¹² Matthew Arnold, *Essays Literary and Critical*, ed. by Ernest Rhys (London and Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1906), pp. ix-xiv (p.ix).

²¹³ Joseph Laurence Black, *The Broadview Anthology Of British Literature: The Victorian Era* (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2006). p.433.

which the academy is a member, and the 'provincial'; that which falls outside the proper governance of the establishment, and as such suffers a deficiency of true cultural value.

Arnold's preface to *Culture and Anarchy* (first published as a series of essays in *Cornhill Magazine* between 1867 and 1868) proposes the objectives of his assessment of culture as 'the great help out of our present difficulties'.²¹⁴ To unpack this assertion, Arnold provides a definition of his concept of culture as 'the best which has been thought and said in the world'.²¹⁵ Arnold acknowledges the problem of relying upon an incomplete and unfulfilling knowledge of one's position in relation to the greater structures of society. By refreshing one's understanding with a better knowledge, informed by the better elements of culture, improvement can be effected by:

turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits, which we now follow staunchly but mechanically, vainly imagining that there is a virtue in following them staunchly which makes up for the mischief of following them mechanically.²¹⁶

Already the element of value, signified by a notion of selective qualification (the best which has been thought and said) situates Arnold's rhetoric in an appeal for inclusions and exclusions to be made. As if in response to a predictable assault on

²¹⁴ Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, p.5.

²¹⁵ Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, p.5.

²¹⁶ Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, p.5.

his elitism, he introduces a caveat to the dialectical structure of valuable and valueless literary culture, asserting the importance of reading in and of itself:

And yet, futile as are many bookmen, and helpless as books and reading often prove for bringing nearer to perfection those who use them, one must, I think, be struck more and more, the longer one lives, to find how much, in our present society, a man's life of each day depends for its solidity and value on whether he reads during that day, and, far more still on what he reads during it.²¹⁷

Certainly Arnold still avows his selective processes, as indicated in the final remarks of the above statement. However, he goes on:

If a man without books or reading, or reading nothing but his letters and the newspapers, gets nevertheless a fresh and free play of the best thoughts upon his stock notions and habits, he has got culture. He has got that for which we prize and recommend culture; he has got that which at the present moment we seek culture that it may give us. This inward operation is the very life and essence of culture, as we conceive it.²¹⁸

As an organizing structure, this appears to situate Arnold uncannily close to a pluralistic notion of literature within culture. As long as value can be found by the reader, value is present in the text. However, Arnold's sentiment may appear to be a concession, he is in fact reframing his elitism as a qualification of the 'feelers'

²¹⁷ Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, p.5.

²¹⁸ Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, pp.5-6.

rather than the literature. 'If a man' is an implicit separation of the body of 'readers' into a hierarchy of qualified participants. Arnold guilefully offers us the suggestion that the 'inward operation' of reading, of extracting value, is an objectively positive process, but he then suggests the opposite:

Nevertheless, it is not so easy to frame one's discourse concerning the operation of culture, as to avoid giving frequent occasion to a misunderstanding whereby the essential inwardness of the operation is lost sight of.²¹⁹

Concession successfully orchestrated, Arnold returns to familiar elitist ground. In seeking to re-establish a dialectic of value, Arnold offers an opposition between Establishment and Non-Conformists, who represent for Arnold a quality of the provincial:

The great works by which, not only in literature, art, and science generally, but in religion itself, the human spirit has manifested its approaches to totality, and a full, harmonious perfection, and by which it stimulates and helps forward the world's general perfection, come, not from Nonconformists, but from men who either belong to Establishments or have been trained in them.²²⁰

There is no ambiguity regarding the false dilemma Arnold seeks to construct. In his essay 'The Literary Influence of Academies', Arnold asserts that: 'The less a literature has felt the influence of a supposed centre of correct information, correct

²¹⁹ Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, p.6.

²²⁰ Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, pp.9-10.

judgement, correct taste, the more we shall find in it this note of provinciality'.²²¹

He further highlights the remarks of the French critic Ernest Renan: "'All ages," says M. Renan again, "have had their inferior literature; but the danger of our time is that this inferior literature tends more and more to get the upper place. No one has the same advantage as the academy for fighting against this mischief"''.²²² Arnold makes common cause with this line of rhetoric. The primary function of the academy is one of quality control, and a movement out of the stricture of the academy constitutes for Arnold a surrender to our lower, provincial nature. There is of course no doubt that Arnold is engaging in wilful controversy. He recognizes the unpopularity of such distinctions: 'Such an effort to set up a recognised authority, imposing on us a high standard in matters of intellect and taste, has many enemies in human nature'.²²³ For Arnold, intransigence is a hallmark of the Nonconformist, an argument he proposes in the abstract as a human condition, but which he leaves no doubt that he, and right minded readers have eluded: 'We like to be suffered to lie comfortably in the old straw of our habits, especially of our intellectual habits, even though this straw may not be very clean and fine'.²²⁴

Nonconformity, which manifests for Arnold in a vulgarized provincialism, has become so because of the particular situation the Nonconformists finds themselves operating in. Comments in his essay 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time'

²²¹ Matthew Arnold, 'The Literary Influence of Academies', in, *Essays Literary and Critical*, ed. by Ernest Rhys (London and Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1906), pp.26-51 (p.38).

²²² Arnold, *Essays Literary and Critical*, p.29.

²²³ Arnold, *Essays Literary and Critical*, p.29.

²²⁴ Arnold, *Essays Literary and Critical*, p.29.

first published in 1865 (here quoted from *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature*) paint the Nonconformist, the 'practical man' as stubborn, intransigent:

For the practical man is not apt for finer distinctions, and yet in these distinctions truth and the highest culture greatly find their account. But it is not easy to lead a practical man – unless you reassure him as to your practical intentions, you have no chance of leading him... Where shall we find language innocent enough, how shall we make the purity of our intentions evident enough.²²⁵

The critical element here is Arnold's evocation of an 'innocent language' – language being operative to the question of a practice of poetry which relies upon communication. This is a point I will return to. For now, as an explication of the disparity in quality, Arnold suggests that the Nonconformist is 'not in contact with the main current of national life, like the member of an Establishment'.²²⁶ However, the national life, as Arnold proposes, assumes an objectivity over distinctions of quality which simply does not exist. For Arnold, the Nonconformist is circumscribed by his audacity in assigning his own sense of value:

the precious discoveries of himself and his friends for expressing the inexpressible and defining the undefinable in peculiar forms of their own, cannot but, as he has voluntarily chosen them, and is personally responsible for them, fill his whole mind. He is zealous to do battle for

²²⁵ Black, p.466.

²²⁶ Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, pp.10-11.

them and affirm them, for in affirming them he affirms himself, and that is what we all like.²²⁷

The dubiousness of Arnold's sublimation of his own need for affirmation to a persuasively grandiose notion of 'national life', the unacknowledged complication of assuming that his idea of the Establishment deserves such a label, is conspicuously absent. Arnold further reinforces the necessity of great literature (and its provisions as offered by the Academy) to the spirit of the nation a convincing argument which serves the dual purpose of tacitly adding its credibility to the false construct Arnold has created of his particular concept of national life.²²⁸

Value then, is an element that must be assigned judiciously, and by a select body: 'The provincial spirit, again, exaggerates the value of its ideas for want of a high standard at hand by which to try them'.²²⁹ Arnold attempts to further castigate the provincial spirit, making direct reference to the association with, and admiration of, the newspaper: 'the provincial spirit likes in the newspaper just what makes the newspaper such bad food for it'.²³⁰ It is perhaps telling that the essay, published in the *Cornhill Magazine* in August 1864, predated Arnold's remarks regarding the inherent value of reading, even if it be 'nothing but... the newspaper' (as quoted above) by only a few years.

²²⁷ Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, p.11.

²²⁸ Arnold, *Essays Literary and Critical*, pp.34-35.

²²⁹ Arnold, *Essays Literary and Critical*, p.41.

²³⁰ Arnold, *Essays Literary and Critical*, p.42.

Two Cultures

Arnold's remarks regarding the provincial spirit are undeniably assertions of a general cultural elitism: 'The mass of mankind will never have any ardent zeal for seeing things as they are; very inadequate ideas will always satisfy them. On these inadequate ideas repose, and must repose, the general practice of the world'.²³¹ It would be germane of me at this point to admit that such a pronounced assertion of said elitism is in response to Arnold's position as staunch defender of literature and the humanities. Arnold's investment in the question of value, particularly regarding the conflicting relationship between humanities and sciences disciplines in a larger sphere of social education, could be read as beneficial, given the context of a poetics of performance trying to find its place within the academy. As Francis O'Gorman argues in his essay 'Making Meaning: Literary Research in the Twenty-first Century':

Science, Arnold said, provided hard, objective knowledge. But what of the moral or aesthetic faculties... The arts and humanities, to use the modern labels, addressed the fullest conception of the human being and responded to, and shaped, what ought to be their best desires.²³²

Situating an analysis of value within a wider debate regarding cultural and social practice errs towards a re-interpretation favouring questions of utility alongside

²³¹ Black, p.466.

²³² Francis O'Gorman, 'Making Meaning: Literary Research in the Twenty-first Century', in *The Public Value of the Humanities*, ed. by Jonathan Bate (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), p.273.

structural, target orientated questions of inclusion and exclusion. The modern question of value in the context of the humanities cannot be separated from a distinction between arts and the sciences:

But literary criticism, like the humanities in general, has entered a newly intensified relationship with science's role in culture, broadly defined. Against those branches of the hard sciences with their potential for direct intervention in material life... Where, indeed, can the advanced practice of literary criticism, especially that which is primarily – as in the UK at present – sustained by public funds – begin to have a place amid the buoyant claims of such disciplines?²³³

Arnold's role in this debate is, regardless of his elitism, one of importance: 'Arnold's notion has remained consequential for educational theory, and the place of the arts and humanities within it. Indeed, it is hard to shake off Arnold even if one knows his argument will no longer quite do'.²³⁴ O'Gorman calls into question Arnold's relevance to contemporary academia but the assumption that he forms a keystone for the developing relationship between the humanities and the sciences is not unfounded. A salient element of this discourse of binaries can be recognized in two speeches delivered at two separate Royal Academy of the Arts annual banquets, one by Arnold in 1881, and its response from a peer and contemporary of his, Thomas Henry Huxley, in 1883. The speeches, each delivered after the Academy's customary toast to 'Science and Literature'²³⁵ attempt to delineate what

²³³ O'Gorman, p.273.

²³⁴ O'Gorman, p.273.

²³⁵ Whence a man 'of the Sciences' and a man 'of Literature' are invited to speak for each.

components of education are necessary for the foundation of true culture.

Although this was certainly not the only occasion that Arnold and Huxley traded comments regarding their respective roles as champions and spokesmen for their disciplines, these speeches formed the core of the larger debate between the two men and the discourse between the arts and the sciences in general in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Arnold's opening remarks in his 1881 speech determined the temperature of this engagement: 'I suppose everybody must be in some degree conscious that the general estimate of literature, of its powers and value, is not at present quite what it once was'.²³⁶ In response to Arnold's conjectures²³⁷ Huxley's argument skirted across Arnold's rhetoric of dominance between disciplines:

I am unable to understand how anyone with a knowledge of mankind can imagine that the growth of science can threaten the development of art in any of its forms. If I understand the matter at all, science and art are the obverse and reverse of Nature's medal, the one expressing the eternal order of things in terms of feeling, the other in terms of thought.²³⁸

²³⁶ David A. Roos, 'Matthew Arnold and Thomas Henry Huxley: Two Speeches at the Royal Academy 1881 and 1883', in *Modern Philology*, Vol. 74, Issue. 3, (1977), pp.316-324 (p.319).

²³⁷ As well, no doubt, to the later statements made in Arnold's 1882 Rede lecture 'Literature and Science': 'I am boldly going to ask whether the present movement for ousting letters from their old predominance in education, and for transferring the predominance in education to the natural sciences, whether this brisk and flourishing movement ought to prevail, and whether it is likely that in the end it really will prevail' Matthew Arnold, 'Literature and Science', *Rede Lecture*, Cambridge, 1882 (p.218).

²³⁸ Roos, pp.321-322.

In this respect both academics attempted to find common ground. However, although Huxley's defence of the sciences attempted to argue that they did not present a threat to the balance between the disciplines, Arnold had only to invoke what appeared to be received knowledge – that the arts were fighting a losing battle. This kind of rhetoric of course proved fertile ground to cultivate an argument which heedlessly pushed forward under the peril of defeat. It is precisely from this carelessness that I argue a binary can be established between arts and sciences which further excludes that which elitists such as Arnold do not accommodate within the arts, the non-conformism of performance poetry and spoken word being the relevant example.

The common ground between the arts and sciences which Huxley and Arnold both gesture towards articulates a distinct disparity between the exclusions and inclusions within the disciplines. Huxley closed his 1883 lecture by offering the relationship between the sciences and the arts as a necessary deployment of two cooperating sides of human nature:

When men no longer love or hate; when suffering causes no pity, and the tale of great deeds ceases to thrill; when the lily of the field shall seem no longer more beautifully arrayed than Solomon in all his glory, and the awe has vanished from the snow-capped peak and deep ravine, then, indeed, science may have the world to itself. But it will not be because the monster has devoured art, but because one side of human

nature is dead, and because men have lost half of their ancient and present attribute.²³⁹

The key to Huxley's position relies on the presentation of human nature, and the 'ancient and present attribute' which the arts fulfil. In this context Huxley offers the arts as a public good – an irreducible element of the human. Huxley offers this in response to Arnold's 1881 speech where Arnold presents the case for unity between the disciplines as a seemingly open-ended reminder that the sciences and the arts are on the same side: 'But there is one consoling thought which in this Royal Academy of Arts can hardly fail to visit the man of letters; it is that we and you are, if I may venture to say so, in the same boat.'²⁴⁰ Though this may seem as generous spirited as Huxley's grander appeal to the twin sides of human nature it is followed by a tract of such vigorous self-congratulation that it leaves no question as to whom Arnold means to share his boat with:

From you, at least, when Science is bidding us to stand on one side, we may hope for sympathy. And the same thought of your sympathy comes to my aid, too, when I turn to your other guests, even more splendid than the men of science; when I survey this brilliant company of Princes, Ministers of State, noble and wealthy patrons of art, whom you have collected round you, and wonder what can have induced you to import among them such an inutility as a poor man of letters. After all, with us you have sympathies which you cannot have with these grander guests.

²³⁹ Roos, p.322.

²⁴⁰ Roos, p.319.

Their functions are high and honourable, their sympathy with art and literature is refining and precious; yet how remote is their experience and career from ours. Take one part only. Our struggle-yours and ours-what do they know of it? What do they know of it, these favourites of fortune, for whom existence, at any rate, has been always secure and easy, and who, so far as the great first needs of our poor mortality are concerned-lodging, food, and raiment-never passed an anxious hour, what do they know of the struggle through which even the most gifted and successful artists and authors have often to pass at the outset, and from which many and many a one among us never emerges?[...] They know nothing of it, they can know nothing of it.²⁴¹

I include this rather lengthy extract in full in order to best explicate the trap that Arnold arranges by assuming that the distinction between the 'poor man of letters' and the wealth of the patron satisfies suspicions regarding his elitism. A declaration of some small unity against the material elitism of the bourgeois does not assure a denouncement of elitism in general – quite the opposite. Arnold seeks to induce the man of science into a boat of shared struggle, which is to say the conspiracy of the academic, regardless of their discipline: 'Before their sister, Science, now so full of promise and pride, was born, there were Art and Literature, like twins together... If we are not necessary, you are not necessary'.²⁴² This should not be a new revelation when we consider Arnold's habitual evaluation of establishment and non-conformity. Although Arnold is depicted as a champion of value in the arts this

²⁴¹ Roos, p.319.

²⁴² Roos, p.319.

depiction risks blindness to the issues of inclusion and exclusion in the face of science. For science is offered as an opponent of such horizon dominating magnitude that it cannot but contribute to the formation of a problematic dialectic which has shifted focus away from the still necessary conversation: what, exactly, comprises the arts.

Necessary though it may be to have this conversation, the debate between humanities and the sciences is still important - even more so in a contemporary context as the terrain, particularly in education, shifts towards a more homochromatic insistence on utility. This itself produces further problems. The kind of elitism which is anticipated by an incompatible high and low dynamic within the arts stymies the necessary paradigm shift which would bring performance poetry into the academy. In addition, so too might the radically destabilizing presence of an unwieldy arts-science binary circumscribe any meaningful discussion of value in the humanities. Arnold may certainly have been a touchstone for the debate as it began to take shape in the nineteenth century, but alongside shifts accompanying the development of Modernist and New Critical practices the discourse has taken on a different shape: 'On the old issue of the relation between arts and sciences, the debate has certainly moved on (Arnold was hardly describing it accurately in his own day). Few are now persuaded of the former claims that the sciences offer objective knowledge and arts subjective'.²⁴³ One strongly articulated contemporary iteration of the question which surrounds value and its relationship to arts is made by Helen Small in *The Value of the Humanities* (2013).²⁴⁴ Small, who favours Arnold

²⁴³ O'Gorman, p.273.

²⁴⁴ Helen Small, *The Value of the Humanities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

with a more sympathetic treatment, posits his discourse with Huxley as the foundation of a more contemporary debate between the British chemist and novelist C. P. Snow and F. R. Leavis: 'Many will know that Snow/Leavis was a reworking of a famous but less sharply antagonistic series of encounters between Thomas Huxley and Matthew Arnold during the early 1880s'.²⁴⁵ C. P. Snow's 'The Two Cultures' Rede lecture delivered in 1959 gathered attention for its stark presentation of the division between the arts and the sciences:

I believe the intellectual life of the whole of western society is increasingly being split into two polar groups. When I say intellectual life, I mean to include also a large part of our practical life, because I should be the last person to suggest the two can at the deepest level be distinguished... at one pole we have the literary intellectuals, who incidentally while no one was looking took to referring to themselves as 'intellectuals' as though there were no others... Literary intellectuals at one pole – at the other scientists, and as the most representative, the physical scientists.²⁴⁶

One may imagine that this suggests ground gained. Certainly the assertion that a division between intellectual and practical life cannot be achieved indicates a shift in momentum away from the kind of literary elitism which, for the sake of self-preservation, sought to maintain such a division. Snow's thesis has been roundly criticised for the simplification it manufactures, something it would be only fair to

²⁴⁵ Small, p.31.

²⁴⁶ C.P. Snow, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1961), p.4.

remark that Snow himself recognized: 'The number 2 is a very dangerous number: that is why the dialectic is a dangerous process. Attempts to divide anything into two ought to be regarded with much suspicion'.²⁴⁷ However – the critical backlash it engendered rightly pilloried the problematic presentation of the two poles, and especially a bias fulfilled by the contention that the sciences were somehow the truer and more valuable of the two cultures: 'If the scientists have the future in their bones, then the traditional culture responds by wishing the future did not exist'.²⁴⁸ This bias is doubly confirmed when read alongside Snow's allusions to the events and aftermath of the Second World War as noted by the critic Guy Ortolano: 'Behind Snow's lamenting of the gap between the sciences and the humanities lay a clear message: the implications of the literary culture in the worst atrocities of the twentieth century had rendered it morally bankrupt, while scientists held the keys to progress in the technical know-how of industrial advance'.²⁴⁹ Even Snow's apparent plurality encounters trouble when, flying in the face of his own admirable attempts to avoid becoming a proponent of exclusion, he states that 'This polarisation is sheer loss to us all. To us as people, and to our society. It is at the same time practical and intellectual and creative loss, and I repeat that it is false to imagine that those three considerations are clearly separable'.²⁵⁰ He then tacitly reaffirms the link between value and exclusion:

²⁴⁷ Snow, pp.9-10.

²⁴⁸ Snow, p.12.

²⁴⁹ Guy Ortolano, 'Two Cultures, One University: The Institutional Origins of the Two Cultures' Controversy, in *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, Vol. 34. Issue 4 (2002), pp.606-624, p.609.

²⁵⁰ Snow, p.12.

A good many times I have been present at gatherings of people who, by the standards of the traditional culture, are thought highly educated and who have with considerable gusto been expressing their incredulity at the illiteracy of scientists. Once or twice I have been provoked and have asked the company how many of them could describe the Second Law of Thermodynamics. The response was cold: it was also negative. Yet I was asking something which is about the scientific equivalent of: *Have you read a work of Shakespeare's?*²⁵¹

Whereas the original debate between Arnold and Huxley, couched as it was in the context of the respective Royal Academy of the Arts speeches maintained an element of civility, the vituperative riposte Leavis levelled at Snow in his 1962 response *Two Cultures? The Significance of C. P. Snow*²⁵² reframed the vitality of the discourse. As Helen Small notes: 'With Snow/Leavis what had been a friendly contest of priorities within a context of more important shared commitments... became a far more rivalrous exhibition of distinct commitments (opposing politics, conflicting attitudes to history and modernity)'.²⁵³ The role Leavis played in representing the politics of the two cultures debate must be recognized as it was his political position which implicitly nourished his stewardship of the academy and the canon. In his Richmond lecture, delivered at Downing College Cambridge in 1962, Leavis described Snow as a portent of a degenerating modern public, displacing literary standards as the central and guiding principle of the academy. If

²⁵¹ Snow, pp.15-16.

²⁵² F.R. Leavis, *Two Cultures? The Significance of C. P. Snow* (Cambridge: Canto Classics, 2013).

²⁵³ Small, p.34.

not excessive, Leavis's tone and behaviour has been considered extreme. Helen Small suggests that, taken in the context of Arnold/Huxley, Snow/Leavis changed the shape of academic debate from an ethos of gentlemanly civility to one more clearly defined by ideas of the academy as profession, the academic as professional:

Looking at the progression of two cultures antagonisms across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is clear that the social contexts, not least the class contexts, that contained them in the high Victorian period could no longer be relied upon by the 1960s, even if the predominant response to Leavis was dismay at his abandonment of politeness ('an impermissible tone', in Lionel Trilling's much repeated phrase). But it is equally clear that when the two cultures conflict came back to prominence in the 1990s it was to a degree contained by an alternative ethos that had (and has) some of the same constraining features as Victorian 'gentlemanly' debate – namely, the ethos of professionalism.²⁵⁴

It is of particular interest that Small evokes professionalism in categorizing the Snow/Leavis debate, for this suggests that the defence of the values of the university, indeed the question of value itself is rather more a political than a moral, or an aesthetic one.²⁵⁵ This political element is reinforced by critic Guy Ortolano as

²⁵⁴ Small, pp.35-36.

²⁵⁵ Small also offers further explicit gestures towards the wider political contexts surrounding Snow/Leavis as markers for deconstructing the argument: 'It is a standard, and correct, observation on the most famous and fractious of two culture encounters that it tells us very little about the kinds of work the participants' university colleagues were doing at the time but a great deal about the wider social, cultural, institutional, and political factors that had a bearing on the argument. Successive historical re-readings have pointed to the influence on both men of early 1960s debates

the motive behind Leavis's aggression in his article 'Two Cultures, One University: The Institutional Origins of the 'Two Cultures' Controversy':

Not only was Snow the product and advocate of the modernization that Leavis had long identified as the threat to an embattled culture, but his Rede Lecture assaulted the position of the English School as the defence of that culture. It was in response to both the intellectual and the institutional challenges that The Two Cultures posed to Leavis's program that he reached for his revolver in the Richmond Lecture.²⁵⁶

The defence of value in the university reframed as a political and professional struggle characterizes the difficulty of underscoring value objectively. By accepting this difficulty one is forced also to accept the correlative relationship between subjectivity and exclusion. What can be seen in the conflict between Perloff, Yankelevich, and Myles is that debates centred on value struggle to elude the problem of elitism when it is levelled as a counter-argument to any attempts to define value. One may argue that a potential paradigm shift posed as a release from the current structure of the criticism of poetry was in fact attempted through Leavis's response to the problem of the two cultures. However, in my analysis of *Revaluation* and New Critical approaches I can find no evidence that such a release was effected. Leavis certainly occupied an important place in the English academy, but as I have proposed in my comparison to the US academy, there existed and exist exclusions, chiefly performance as a critical medium. Despite concerted

over social class, culture, meritocracy, university expansionism, democracy, and the relation between technological progress and political progress' (Small, p.35).

²⁵⁶ Ortolano, pp.623-624.

interest in the elements which constitute the performance of poetry, in the Leavisian model of literary criticism it finds no purchase. In order to fully explore the reasons for this exclusion it is necessary to consider not only the operation Leavis and New Criticism undertook as a response to the perceived cultural, social, and intellectual degradations of the two cultures, but the influences which guided its establishment.²⁵⁷

Spoken word and critical practice in I. A. Richards

The aversion Leavis had towards what he perceived as the debasing influence of technological advances bears striking resemblance to, and was doubtless fostered by, the influence of I. A. Richards on Leavis's early career as a critic. The following quote from Richards's seminal text *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgement*, first published in 1929 when Richards and Leavis were contemporaries at Cambridge, articulates the similarity: 'It is arguable that mechanical inventions, with their social effects, and a too sudden diffusion of

²⁵⁷ Ortolano refers to the respective Snow/Leavis defences as part of a grander mission to restore and restructure the academy: 'Snow and Leavis clashed in their contradictory notions of that mission. To Snow, the university served as an engine of economic and social change. The rise in student enrolments meant the extension of the social mobility that had propelled him into the upper echelons of the establishment, and the shift in the emphasis of the universities from the arts to the sciences fostered the continued economic advance that science and technology promised. Leavis, on the contrary, believed that the university must serve as a refuge from such 'progress.' He had long maintained that the industrial advance Snow trumpeted subordinated literary standards to the whims of the market, resulting in the absence of the capacity for critical thought. Leavis insisted that the English School stand at the centre of the elite university, secure from-and in defiance of-the debasement of mass society' (Ortolano, p.623).

indigestible ideas, are disturbing throughout the world the whole order of human mentality'.²⁵⁸ As with Leavis, Richards's writing emphasised a solution to the problems of social and cultural degradation through a pronounced exclusivity of reading practice. In two of Richards's most famous works, *Principles of Literary Criticism* and the aforementioned *Practical Criticism*, Richards delineates the problems of what he perceives as inferior critical faculties and reading practices.²⁵⁹ Because he interrogated the hermeneutic process rather than engage with the results of readings Richards's closer focus on the relationship between reader and text gave root to some of the fundamental principles which Leavis would develop further.²⁶⁰ As would be seen in Leavis's later writing, a similar weight of conviction can be observed in Richards's critical disconcertment with modernization. The threat posed by 'social effect' and 'sudden diffusion of indigestible ideas' seems to position the performance of poetry in a perilous crosshair. In Richards's critical deconstruction of the relationship between poetry and the individual the exclusivism which hallmarked Leavisian reading is self-evident: 'We cannot avoid the material of poetry. If we do not live in consonance with good poetry, we must live in consonance with bad poetry. And, in fact, the idle hours of most lives are filled with reveries that are simply bad private

²⁵⁸ Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.320.

²⁵⁹ I.A. Richards. *Principles of Literary Criticism* (London: K. Paul, 1924).

²⁶⁰ The critic John Constable attests to this in his introduction to the collected essays *I.A. Richards: Selected Works 1919-1938. Volume 10: I.A. Richards and his critics*: 'the importance of Richards in Leavis's early published writings is beyond doubt. The opening pages of *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture* (1930) quote Richards's *Principles of Literary Criticism* in support of Leavis's contention that a critical elite stands to general population as gold does to paper currency. A letter to the *Spectator* of the 9th of April 1932 remarks that everyone concerned with literary criticism, and especially at Cambridge, has incurred a debt to Richards'. John Constable. *I.A. Richards: Selected Works 1919-1938. Volume 10: I.A. Richards and his critics* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp.52-53.

poetry'.²⁶¹ Ortolano identifies Richards as the benefactor of Leavis's mission in this regard:

Richards argued that it was the literary critic who must maintain standards. He positioned the new English School at the centre of this mission, and he took the lead in establishing the study of English in Cambridge as a serious and rigorous field of study. As the 1920s wore on, however, Richards became increasingly uncomfortable in the role of champion of English. He was frequently absent from Cambridge, and eventually left altogether for Harvard in 1939. Having established the credentials of Cambridge English, Richards left its guardianship to a circle of enthusiasts centred around Leavis, and it was in Leavis that the fusion of the campaign against mass society and the mission of the English School reached its fullest expression.²⁶²

As Ortolano avers, the political elements which became the fuel for Leavis's bloodlust in his response to Snow were, for Richards, a more complicated burden. Richards's withdrawal is all the more pertinent considering his acrimonious fall out with Leavis in the mid-thirties following the latter's review of Richards - among other factors explored in Constable's *I. A. Richards & His Critics*.²⁶³ I contend that this resistance to engaging in some of the more dogmatically political elements of the mission resulted from the fact that, unlike Leavis's attendance to the page, Richards's practical criticism was possessed of a sensitivity to elements that Leavis

²⁶¹ Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.320.

²⁶² Ortolano, p.615.

²⁶³ See particularly Constable, pp.426-434.

overlooked in his subsequent development. Although Richards firmly believed in a poetics of exclusion his criticism suggests a temperament more flexible to certain currents of change brought about by Modernity. Propitiously in the case for an engagement with the performance of poetry this temperament stems predominantly from an attention to affect, and to the material world. Returning to Richards's *Practical Criticism* and in particular his section devoted to a general value of poetry, the context of his statements regarding the role of the academy come with a caveat: 'Doubtless to some degree poetry, like the other arts, is a secret discipline to which some initiation is needed. Some readers are excluded from it simply because they have never discovered, and have never been taught, how to enter'.²⁶⁴ For Richards the entry point into poetry is not a retreat into the page but a refined sensitivity to the world: 'For there is no such gulf between poetry and life as over-literary persons sometimes suppose. There is no gap between our everyday emotional life and the material of poetry'.²⁶⁵ Richards's description of the active processes whereby he posits poetry as a representation of the everyday world paints a very clear picture of how he believes poetry operates. One cannot fail to recognize in this operation the implied relationship between poetry and not only the spoken (verbal) lyric²⁶⁶, but the chiromatic, performed gestures which are foregrounded and enabled by the importance of a bodily reception of poetry: 'Poetry translates into its special sensory language a great deal that is given in the

²⁶⁴ Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.319.

²⁶⁵ Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.319.

²⁶⁶ The element of 'voice' inculcated in Richards' practice stands particularly distinct from New Critical modes of textual analysis as the critic Heather Yeung avers: 'For the New Critics, the difficulty in pinning down the provenance of poetic voice led to an elevation of the idea of a neutral, fictionalized, "speaker" of the poem, an entity apart from the author, which often produced the dramatic monologue readings of a poem that Jonathan Culler so fears'. (Yeung, p.64).

ordinary daily intercourse between minds by gesture, tones of voice, and expression'.²⁶⁷ This sublimation of poetry as a material process representative of and engaged with everyday emotional life appears far more suited than a formalist close reading to addressing the development of a performance poetics. However as with Leavis, so with Richards also we must acknowledge the undercurrent of exclusion implicit in the fact that in his critical discourse Richards maintains firm, value-driven academic boundaries between the intended art and the everyday: 'The verbal expression of this life, at its finest, is forced to use the technique of poetry; that is the only essential difference'.²⁶⁸ Distancing himself from a more generalized idea of poetry as bodily and material, Richards remains complicit with critical faculties which gesture towards the academic position:

No psychological dissection can do harm, except to minds which are in a pathological condition. The fear that to look too closely may be damaging to what we care about is a sign of a weak or ill-balanced interest. There is a certain frivolity of the passions that does not imply a greater delicacy, a more perfect sensibility, but only a trifling or flimsy constitution. Those who 'care too much for poetry' to examine it closely are probably flattering themselves. Such exquisites may be pictured explaining their objections to Coleridge or to Schiller.²⁶⁹

Questioning this argument risks undermining the case for performance poetry. Critical engagement is no bad thing, and of course it would be ridiculous to suggest

²⁶⁷ Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.319.

²⁶⁸ Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.319.

²⁶⁹ Richards, *Practical Criticism*, pp.322-323.

performance poetry exists on a rarefied plane where analysis damages the integrity of the work (indeed, arguments for the pedagogical potential of performance poetry categorically oppose this). But fear of two cultures thinking and the industriousness of science threatening the values of the arts all too often results in the questioning of value, even as the critic attempts to protect it. The fact that this critical separation occurs between poetry and the material at the very point of value is problematic, as it creates the exclusions which push performance poetry, and other alternative (non-traditional) approaches to poetry out of the light. However, in the case of Richards, the focus on the relationship between language and material is a redeeming one, as he accedes to the argument that even the educated individual fails under the current critical mode: 'Not a tenth of the power of poetry is released for the general benefit, indeed, not a thousandth part. It fails, not through its own fault, but through our ineptitude as readers. Is there no means to give the 'educated' individual a better receptive command of these resources of language?'.²⁷⁰ What Richards calls for in defence of the rapid encroachment of the sciences 'disturbing throughout the world the whole order of human mentality'²⁷¹ is a practical, dynamic method of reconnecting poetry to language and thus to the body:

If there be any means by which we may artificially strengthen our minds' capacity to order themselves, we must avail ourselves of them.

And of all possible means, Poetry, the unique, linguistic instrument by which our minds have ordered their thoughts, emotions, desires... in the

²⁷⁰ Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.321.

²⁷¹ Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.320.

past, seems to be the most serviceable. It may well be a matter of some urgency for us, in the interests of our standard of civilization, to make this highest form of language more accessible. From the beginning civilization has been dependent upon speech, for words are our chief link with the past and with one another and the channel of our spiritual inheritance. As the other vehicles of tradition, the family and the community, for example, are dissolved, we are forced more and more to rely upon language.²⁷²

What then would this mean for a reorientation of poetics? For Richards this necessarily entails a practical element, language stemming from practice: 'The understanding of speech is an art which we are supposed to acquire chiefly by the light of nature – through the operation of sundry instincts – and to perfect by dint of practice'.²⁷³ This linguistic practice is implicitly connected to the spoken, and to the dimensions of affect enabled by language: 'The actual arousal in ourselves either of the feeling or of the complimentary attitude may take place directly or through our awareness of sense or intention... The cadence of a phrase may instigate a feeling without any intermediaries. Tone, also, we seem to understand sometimes directly'.²⁷⁴

Significantly, the key to Richards's assertions lies in the relationship between intellectual and emotional instruments: 'The most elaborate feelings develop in us, however, only through thought and intention'.²⁷⁵ In certain vital ways this mirrors

²⁷² Richards, *Practical Criticism*, pp.320-321.

²⁷³ Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.324.

²⁷⁴ Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.332.

²⁷⁵ Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.331.

the general struggle of the two cultures debate. In Richards's defence against the dangers of an increasingly dominant scientific academia suffocating the arts he suggests a way to readdress the binary:

Inquiry cannot be stopped now. The only possible course is to hasten, so far as we can, the development of a psychology which will ignore none of the facts and yet demolish none of the values that human experience has shown to be necessary. An account of poetry will be a pivotal point in such a psychology.²⁷⁶

What Richards proposes as a response to the two cultures divide in *Practical Criticism* published in 1929, and what his protégé Leavis distanced himself from in *Revaluation* published in 1936 less than a decade later, seem less similar when cast in this light. The idea of the academic 'trying to do the reader's reading for him'²⁷⁷ stands in contrast to Richards's gambit of a liberating, language-centred poetics which sought to position '[t]he verbal expression of this life, at its finest'²⁷⁸ as culturally prominent. The performance of poetry, and the multi-directional collaborative platform provided by the performative act engages with the root of Richards's necessary alignment of intellectual and emotional instruments. Speaking aloud, performing to an audience emancipates the exchange, the best possible engagement with language as practice: 'Language is primarily a social product, and it is not surprising that the best way to display its action is through the agency of a group'.²⁷⁹ Richards's association with Leavis had a profound influence upon the

²⁷⁶ Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.323.

²⁷⁷ Martin, p.312.

²⁷⁸ Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.319.

²⁷⁹ Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.336.

subsequent development of a Cambridge school. However, though Leavis moved closer to the text by engineering an antipathy to emotional engagement with poetry, in *Practical Criticism* Richards offers a practice based approach to literary criticism which I venture cannot be detached from a nascent acceptance of the role played by affect in the reading experience. It must be noted that Richards presents a looser sense of affect, his depiction of emotion circles around a distinction he draws between sense and feeling, and it is the latter which Richards uses in a somewhat vague fashion to stand as an oblique signifier for general emotional response. However, although Richards may not make the finer distinctions which could be identified in a more stringent study of affect and affect transaction his observations are nonetheless of interest to a study of performance poetry as they suggest a great deal of comprehension of performance poetics.²⁸⁰

Far from the notion of an individualist, internalized, narrow attention to text Richards advertises the correlation of both sense and feeling through attention to emotional response. Richards repudiates the reader who feature-spots without questioning the value of the emotional experience: 'Readers who take up a poem as though it were a bicycle, spot its metre, and pedal off on it regardless of where it is going, will naturally, if it is a good poem, get into trouble. For only a due awareness of its sense and feeling will bring its departures from the pattern metre into a coherent, satisfying whole'.²⁸¹ One might contend that, for Richards, the

²⁸⁰ In his introduction to *Practical Criticism* Richards foregrounds his belief in the performance behind the text:

'Parallel to, and not unconnected with, these difficulties of interpreting the meaning are the difficulties of sensuous apprehension. Words in sequence have a form to the mind's ear and the mind's tongue and larynx, even when silently read. They have a movement and may have a rhythm' (Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.14).

²⁸¹ Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.230.

emotional experience appears almost distinct from its critical exegesis: 'The sincere feeling, it may be suggested, is one which has been left in its natural state, not worked over and complicated by reflection. Thus strong spontaneous feelings would be more likely to be sincere than feelings that have run the gauntlet of self-criticism'.²⁸² Here, as in all iterations of the argument, the question of value threatens to overbalance a concerted poetics of performance as Richards offers a somewhat inadequate explanation of good poetry's 'mysterious glory' and 'peculiar satisfaction':

How, then, are we to explain this apparent superiority in the sound of good poetry if we admit that on the recording drum its curves might be indistinguishable from those of rubbish. The answer is that the rhythm which we admire, which we seem to detect actually in the sounds, and which we seem to respond to, is something which we only ascribe to them and is, actually, a rhythm of the mental activity through which we apprehend not only the sound of the words but their sense and feeling. The mysterious glory which seems to inhere in the sound of certain lines is a projection of the thought and emotion they evoke, and the peculiar satisfaction they seem to give to the ear is a reflection of the adjustment of our feelings which has been momentarily achieved.²⁸³

In defence of spoken, or performed poetry Richards seems on the surface to be quite enthusiastic here. However, the argument contains within it a paradoxical act

²⁸² Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.282.

²⁸³ Richards, *Practical Criticism*, pp.228-229.

of distancing implicit in the suggestion that the activity of apprehending the feeling, rich or poor, is a mental activity. The mental act in this context requires the reader of poetry to establish the distinction between 'mysterious glory' and 'rubbish'. As well as feeling generating a bodily, material engagement, the reader must also denude the experience as a mental detection. Assessing this engagement one is forced to reacquaint oneself with the exclusivist tendencies which lie behind Richards's criticism. As he states in a later comment: 'Such an explanation has this incidental advantage, that it accounts for the passionate admiration sometimes accorded to stray lines that seem of a mediocre manufacture'.²⁸⁴

For all this, however, Richards's attention to feeling is distinct from Leavisian detachment. In privileging traditional hermeneutics this detachment threatens to isolate the reader from the importance of poetry, which Richards firmly places in its capacity for generating feeling: 'But here we are concerned very little with logical consequences and almost exclusively with emotional consequences. In the effect of the thought upon our feelings and attitudes, all its importance, for poetry, lies'.²⁸⁵ As noted, Richards's exploration of the role of affect in the experience of poetry is far from complete, a gap Richards himself attests to²⁸⁶, but *Practical Criticism* captures a very specific part of the interaction undertaken through the reading experience, an interaction which exemplifies itself through performance: the idea that there is an emotional transference between poet and recipient:

²⁸⁴ Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.229.

²⁸⁵ Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.276.

²⁸⁶ In the course of his analysis Richards explicitly states that: 'no one knows yet what attributes a feeling may have, what their system of interconnections is, or which are important, which trivial'. (Richards, *Practical Criticism*, pp.217-218).

There are two important senses in which we can 'understand' the feeling of a passage. We can either just ourselves undergo the same feeling or we can think of the feeling. Often in witnessing a play, for example, we think of the feelings of the characters, but undergo the feeling the whole action conveys. Obviously we can and do make mistakes in both forms of understanding. Much the same is true of the apprehension of tone, our appreciation of the speaker's attitude towards us.²⁸⁷

In his analysis of Richards's work entitled 'The Practical Criticism of I. A. Richards and Reading Comprehension' (1970) the scholar Robert E. Shafer identifies *Practical Criticism* as 'one of the first major contributions from a literary critic to the study of the reader's comprehension of imaginative literature'.²⁸⁸ Shafer distinctly underscores the pedagogical implications of Richards's text, citing Richards's intention in the introduction to *Practical Criticism* 'to prepare the way for educational methods more efficient than those we now use in developing discrimination and the power to understand what we hear and read'.²⁸⁹ Once again, what may be highlighted in this analysis is the attention to practice over theory:

The last reader's pitfall Richards identified was 'general critical preconceptions.' These are 'prior demands made upon poetry as a result of theories – unconscious or conscious – about its nature and value' which intervene endlessly between the reader and the poem, as

²⁸⁷ Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.331.

²⁸⁸ Robert E. Shafer, 'The Practical Criticism of I. A. Richards and Reading Comprehension', in *Journal of Reading*, Vol. 14. Issue 2 (1970), pp.101-108 (p.101).

²⁸⁹ Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.3.

the history of criticism well shows. His discussion of this particular pitfall develops the concept of a critical point of view operating as reader interference.²⁹⁰

Of course, where affect engages with pedagogy in *Practical Criticism* it is important to recognize that Richards does not shy away from highlighting the potential difficulty of overvaluing emotional responses. As Shafer suggests: 'The sixth pitfall for readers which Richards noted is sentimentality'.²⁹¹ Yet Shafer expands on this point: 'Richards concluded his discussion of sentimentality with the notion that the poet should not shy away from arousing the emotions but should attempt to give 'enough nearness, concreteness, and coherence to the situation to support and control the response that ensues'.²⁹² When Richards discusses the negative aspect of sentimentality he distinguishes between the excessive and the precise, maintaining that certain sounds such as trumpets or nightingales readily evoke certain emotional responses. In this respect he is engaging very clearly with the notion of affect and the semi-agency of our bodies in their emotional transactions.²⁹³ One of the most striking elements that Shafer retains from his study of Richards's *Practical Criticism* is the potential it has as an instructive text; a pedagogical tool for establishing a critical framework based on practice: 'We must, if possible, gain some power of diagnosis, some understanding of the risks that

²⁹⁰ Shafer, p.105.

²⁹¹ Shafer, p.104.

²⁹² Shafer, p.104.

²⁹³ Indeed, Richards goes so far as to suggest that in the seventh difficulty: inhibition is as much of a pitfall to readers and the reading experience: 'The man who, in reaction to the commoner naïve forms of sentimentality, prides himself on his hard-headedness and hard-heartedness, his hard boiledness generally, and seeks out or invents aspects with a bitter or squalid character, for no better reason than this is only displaying a more sophisticated form of sentimentality' (Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.268).

interpretations run, and some capacity to detect what has occurred'.²⁹⁴ What this foregrounding of practice entails might well be the antithesis of New Criticism's definitively self-contained methodology, one which seeks to present a stable exegetical truth by exorcising everything outside of the material artefact of the text. The singularity that this method requires exposes the problem of the lineage from Richards to Leavis. Richards's notion of practice in its comprehensive sense is not simply the educative practice of reading as an abstract skill, but reading as practice itself.

Practice for Richards is an active process of reading, one which does not settle for a singular perspective on a text based on an assumed interpretation but which constantly fluctuates based on the practice of new, dynamic readings of a text. The inference of Richards's approach grants permission to this kind of performative engagement with the act of reading. Subsequently the singular analysis of reading for the sake of a sense of objectivity which presents itself not only in Leavis and in New Criticism but in all iterations of the value debate is replaced by an accommodating framework which is grounded in the live, and living, being.²⁹⁵ Just as Richards's fascination with the emotional resonances of certain sounds indicated, the 'living' basis of Richards's practice is perfectly suited to the spoken word. In performance poetry the dynamic potential for a practice-based approach,

²⁹⁴ Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.336.

²⁹⁵ Richards carefully negates the potential circumscription of tropes of live / lived experience as subjective and therefore imprecise: 'But this shifting, because living, basis for all literary responses does not force us, as some intellectual defeatists, misled by the word 'subjective', may suppose, to an agnostic or indifferentist position. Every response is 'subjective' in the sense that it is a psychological event determined by the needs and resources of a mind' (Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.348).

each 'reading' exploring alternative, fluctuating dimensions of feeling resonates with Richards's argument regarding the notion of a value inherent to subjectivity.

As a solution to the problem of ascribing value in the humanities, and the academy as a whole, the idea of an inherently valuable subjectivity finding purchase in the dynamic potential of spoken word is fertile only insofar as it can escape the ludic, insubstantial characterizations touted by Richards's 'intellectual defeatist'. To do so one must establish a distinct and robust methodology behind the value of subjectivity as a means to constantly expand practice, and by doing so engage meaningfully with feeling. The potential I see in Richards for informing and promoting performance poetics is the attention he paid to establishing a rigorous pedagogical structure to the business of practical criticism. Richards highlighted practical education of feeling as the objective of his theory, and nascent though it may have been - 'No one would pretend that the theory as it is propounded in this book is ready, as it stands, for immediate and wide application'²⁹⁶ - it anticipated a shift in analytical focus towards accepting the value of emotional education. For Richards the consequences of this shift needed to be felt first and foremost in the academy:

However incomplete, tentative, or, indeed, speculative we may consider our present views on this subject, they are far enough advanced to justify some experimental applications, if not in the school period then certainly at the Universities.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁶ Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.337.

²⁹⁷ Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.337.

This being said, as I have suggested, Leavis moved away from this affective dimension. John Mullan's 2013 article 'As if Life Depended on It' in the *London Review of Books* argues that the Leavisian critical mode was not devoid of a strong pedagogical framework:

Admirers and antagonists agree that, more than any other major literary critic, Leavis's influence was exerted through teaching. His classes were mostly devoted to the close analysis of particular passages, the purpose being to detect sincerity, vitality – as Byatt has it, 'authenticity'.²⁹⁸

However, as Mullan elaborates (and here it must be noted that, though the article shifts between praise and condemnation Mullan ultimately professes his fondness for the Leavisian method), 'Leavis owed much to I.A. Richards's advocacy of 'practical criticism', but gave it a special moral intensity. Telling the difference between real wit and mere stylistic facility, or discriminating verbal originality from formulaic phrasing, was a moral imperative'.²⁹⁹ The fact that the hegemony of Leavis surpassed that of Richards rests for Mullan in Leavis's attention to his moral obligation to excoriate the bad. This of course is not a particularly surprising signature of Leavis's exclusivism, a quality which permeated his pedagogy as well as his critical work: 'He was entirely open about his priorities, his circular for teachers announcing that in Practical Criticism candidates would be expected to compare a good passage with a bad one, detecting where qualities such as 'sentimentality or

²⁹⁸ John Mullan. 'As if Life Depended on It', in *London Review of Books* Vol. 35. Issue No. 17 (12 September 2013) pp.10-12 <<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v35/n17/john-mullan/as-if-life-depended-on-it>> [accessed 04 December 2015] (p.10).

²⁹⁹ Mullan, p.10.

insincerity' lay'.³⁰⁰ Behind this vein of moral obligation sits Leavis's own subjectivity. The moral intensity Mullan addresses can be exposed as an exclusion of the sort of material or practical approaches to poetics that Leavis had a personal disinclination towards: 'Leavis's dislike of mass or commercial culture was sustained by many of his disciples. His training in reading was a training in resistance to the modern world, including much that we have come to call popular culture'.³⁰¹ Within this framework of popular culture the provision of an affective dimension through performance certainly finds its place. Here it may be prudent to recall Leavis's criticism of Dryden, whose effects he stated were: 'all for the public ear – for the ear in public (so to speak)'.³⁰² But through criticism of popular culture or resistance to the modern world the Leavisian method displays its own downfall. Accepting the recalcitrance behind this method is a covert acceptance of its temporariness. Though for a time it offered an edifice of critical practice, the emergence of modernist and later post-modernist experimentation in poetic practice ultimately necessitated its outgrowth.³⁰³

Spoken word; value and pedagogy

³⁰⁰ Mullan, p.11.

³⁰¹ Mullan, p.11.

³⁰² Leavis, *Revaluation*, pp.31-32.

³⁰³ Ortolano summarizes this neatly, arguing that: 'The ideas of Leavis, arch-critic of the establishment, themselves became established, and they did so through that process of university expansion that Leavis himself so resolutely opposed. Mass civilization thus continued its inexorable advance, incongruously incorporating F. R. Leavis and his crusade on behalf of the English School' (Ortolano, p.624).

Where then might this leave performance poetry? Interpreting Leavis's moral intensity as a subjective judgement recalls the core interrogation of value that sits behind inclusions and exclusions within the academy. For the critic Rónán McDonald, the question of value has currency within the academy insofar as it describes the relationship between the individual subjective expression and the structure of evaluation: '[Values] differ from statements of fact and observation in that values are not inherent in the object that is valued but rather come from the person doing the valuing'.³⁰⁴ The implication of this is not to suggest that value as subjective measure can only be reduced to subjective whim, but to resituate value in the interaction between individuals: 'values are a matter of culture not nature, of ideology and not fact, of history not timeless reality'.³⁰⁵ Value is discerned by the relativity of individual perceptions rather than an objective measure, and thus to determine what is valued individuals must communicate these perceptions, an act of communication which occurs in the performance space. Summoning the spirit of the two cultures division McDonald affirms the role played by the interrogation of value in the academy specifically in the arts and humanities disciplines:

Science tells us about the 'what' and the 'how', but seldom the 'why'.

This is the domain, rather, for the humanities whose values lie, self-reflectively, in the articulation of what 'value' means.³⁰⁶

By deriving value through the examination of what constitutes value McDonald presents the distinction between intrinsic values and instrumental values: 'those

³⁰⁴ Rónán McDonald, 'The Value of Art and the Art of Evaluation', in *The Public Value of the Humanities*, ed. by Jonathan Bate (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), p.283.

³⁰⁵ McDonald, p.283.

³⁰⁶ McDonald, p.283.

which are good as something and those that are good for something'.³⁰⁷ Not exclusive to the academy but to the cultural identification of value, McDonald avers a bias against the instrumental when discussing the arts: 'The arts may well have social and economic benefits but defenders of artistic or educational innovation are often unhappy about understanding artistic value solely in these instrumental terms. There is a lingering notion in our culture that art is, or should be, intrinsic'.³⁰⁸

I contend that this distinction between values or modes of evaluation surpasses other concerns over the relativity of value within the arts. Leavisian value centres around (as Mullan suggests) a 'moral intensity' which, though debunked as subjectivity, can clearly be located within the remit of intrinsic value. For Perloff, Myles, and Yankelevic, squaring the circle of plurality between the inclusions of the communal and the exclusions of the avant-garde becomes a difficult task, one underpinned by the same mechanisms of suspicion which keep the intrinsic and the instrumental apart. Good 'for' the unification of a community (instrumental) frustrates and is frustrated by good 'as' the best education of the cultural psyche and the avoidance of Perloff's illicit unoriginality (intrinsic). Without doubt this bears out Arnold's vilification of the provincial, in particular the distinctions between the fineness of literature versus the banal utility of, for example, the newspaper: 'the provincial spirit likes in the newspaper just what makes the newspaper such bad food for it'.³⁰⁹ In Richards perhaps, one might posit the beginnings of a third way. Where Richards claims in *Practical Criticism* that 'If there

³⁰⁷ McDonald, p.283.

³⁰⁸ McDonald, p.284.

³⁰⁹ Arnold, *Essays Literary and Critical*, p.42.

be any means by which we may artificially strengthen our minds' capacity to order themselves, we must avail ourselves of them. And of all possible means, Poetry, the unique, linguistic instrument by which our minds have ordered their thoughts, emotions, desires... in the past, seems to be the most serviceable',³¹⁰ one might understand 'serviceable' in this context to hold instrumental potential. Indeed, as Richards maintains, 'There is no gap between our everyday emotional life and the material of poetry',³¹¹ there may be a narrowing of the distinction between instrumental utility (the everyday) and the intrinsic. Insofar as he proffers a pedagogical framework for exploring the practice of poetry, by extension he offers the idea of practical benefits. But of course, Richards is reluctant to fully relinquish his elitism for the very reason that to do so might renegotiate the identity of poetry and art as instrumental, and by doing so lose the quality of the intrinsic; the lingering notion that this is what poetry 'should' be.

Much like the binary between high and low art, the binary between page and stage poetry, this new binary between intrinsic and instrumental requires interrogation. The attractiveness of Richards's critical position is that it offers a practical basis for exploring poetics, and by doing so opens a space for performance poetry, and the importance of the performance of poetry in shaping our poetic understanding.³¹² But corralling practice into a tight relationship with

³¹⁰ Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.320.

³¹¹ Richards, *Practical Criticism*, p.319.

³¹² One could be tempted to offer reassessments of Richards' practical exploration of poetry in, for example: J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975) or Shannon Jackson. 'Rhetoric in Ruins: Performing literature and performance studies', *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts*. Volume 14, Issue 1, (2009) pp.6-16. However, both studies cleave to a notion of orality in poetry which problematically seem to locate performative elements of poetry outside of actual performance.

instrumentality, circumscribing the merit of practice because of its disassociation with the intrinsic presents certain complications. As Richard Howells argues in his essay 'Sorting the Sheep from the Sheep: Value, Worth and the Creative Industries', the assumption of a non-negotiation between the intrinsic and the instrumental in the arts may be a false dichotomy.³¹³ Howells extends the discussion of an instrumental / intrinsic binary by negating the consequences of modes of practice in the arts which engage exclusively with either. He evokes education to make explicit this dynamic, and it is in arts education that I contend that value through performance can be made manifest. In his seminal 1996 text *The University in Ruins* the critic Bill Readings writes of the state of the University at the turn of the century, arguing that:

In the face of student critiques of the contradiction between the University's claim to be a guardian of culture and its growing commitment to bureaucracy, the University has progressively abandoned its cultural claim. Forced to describe itself as either a bureaucratic-administrative or an idealist institution, it chose the former.³¹⁴

³¹³Howells articulates his argument through a discussion of the practical reality of such a dichotomy: 'A problem with opposing the instrumental value of the arts and humanities is that this might seem to rule out any kind of benefit as instrumental. If we were to argue... that the arts are ennobling, then that could be portrayed as an instrumental value, as would the argument that the arts, quite simply, make life better. It's the same with education: if we were to argue for an entirely intrinsic justification of education (education for education's sake), then we would presumably be happy if education had no demonstrable benefit at all! The argument, though, presents us with something of a false dichotomy, for it is in fact possible to argue for the benefits of something without determining in advance precisely what (and only what) those benefits are going to have to be'. Richard Howells, 'Sorting the Sheep from the Sheep: Value, worth and the Creative Industries', in *The Public Value of the Humanities*, ed. by Jonathan Bate (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), p.238.

³¹⁴ Bill Readings, *The University In Ruins* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), p.150.

However bleak this may seem, Readings posits that resistance to this discourse of bureaucracy is possible, and that this resistance is constructed through pedagogies: 'This resource will emerge in the scene of teaching'.³¹⁵ Readings situates his approach to pedagogical resistances in a language which is couched in a very similar manner to the instrumental versus the intrinsic. Of the question of value in relation to pedagogy, Readings insists that the individual keep themselves open, 'which means neither accepting the accounting logic of the bureaucrats nor simply ignoring it in the name of a transcendental value to education'.³¹⁶ As Howells similarly offers, the importance Readings places is on keeping oneself open to both, accepting neither exclusively. This mode of thought follows from Readings' earlier analysis of the place of culture in the higher education institution in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Recalling C. P. Snow, Readings suggests that the development of literary studies, as opposed to philosophy, signalled the beginning of the two cultures division: 'From being philosophical, culture becomes literary. As we shall see, it is the invention of the category of literature that causes the split C. P. Snow notes between scientific culture and literary culture. For the literary is opposed to the scientific in a way philosophy is not'.³¹⁷

Readings further circumscribes the development of the literary canon in an attack on the value of the status of knowledge within such a structure, ascribing the continued presence of the canon to its necessity for the teaching of a literature

³¹⁵ Readings, p.150.

³¹⁶ Readings, p.151.

³¹⁷ Readings, p.70.

reliant upon definition within a curricular structure.³¹⁸ The correlative of this perspective is of course that distinctions are made to occur through the categorization of knowledge into discreet fields which have little to do with the notion of value as an organizing principle: 'The canon therefore gradually comes to function as the arbitrary delimitation of a field of knowledge (an archive) rather than as the vessel that houses the vital principle of the national spirit'.³¹⁹ This description of a vital principle of the national spirit, later interpreted as a cultural spirit, seems to be implicitly indicative of the absence of experiential modes such as performance poetics. In the context of performance poetry specifically, this is a thing which Readings makes explicit in the course of his analysis of the category 'literature' as a problematic element of the exclusive structure of the University: 'the notion of literature emerges when writing is analysed in terms that leave public oratory behind, a rephrasing of textual production that is intimately linked to the rise of the bourgeois public sphere'.³²⁰ Readings posits a task, one which might begin to invest in the potential available through an open pedagogy. The task is delineated by the necessity to accept the breadth of the academy's audience:

Making an audience for this kind of pedagogy 'happen' is the task that faces those of us who find ourselves in the contemporary University – teachers and students alike... Creating and addressing such an audience

³¹⁸ Readings supports an impression of the academy which contrasts contemporary research interests against the simplicity of pedagogical frameworks which stick to particular and likely outdated curricula: 'Nonetheless, the teaching of literature without reference to a canonical structure seems very hard to imagine, so that curricula continue to be structured, and jobs advertised, in reference to historical fields that are no longer held to be valid by many active researchers' (Readings, p.85).

³¹⁹ Readings, p.86.

³²⁰ Readings, p.72.

will not revitalize the University or solve all our problems. It will, however, allow the exploration of differences in ways that are liberating to the extent that they assume nothing in advance.³²¹

Methods of addressing value in the academy through a renaturing of audience are underpinned by Readings' final statement in the above argument. The exploration of differences which 'assume nothing in advance' open the academy to practical and pedagogical approaches previously excluded. The convocation of a diverse body of individuals, an audience, also neatly anticipates the necessity of structuring pedagogy around identity and evokes a material, experiential frame of reference. To clarify, when one imagines the literary canon one perhaps evokes the manifestation of an increasingly non-material division of texts. Rather than the sense that a text's value came from the bodily, material impact it offered to its reader, the inclusion of the text in the contemporary university canon seems to be delineated by something more abstract, something separated from the audience or the manner by which it may be experienced. I contend then, that the re-situation of a pedagogy within the academy which focuses on the bodily experience rather than excluding the bodily experience is not only prudent, but a necessity. This pedagogy of the body, in the context of a focus specifically on the receipt and evaluation of literature, finds clear purchase in the study of performance poetry, and the acceptance of modes of performance as valid (valued) mediums for exploring literary texts.

³²¹ Readings, p.165.

Re-situation of the body in the pedagogic experience offered by the literary academy may not, as Readings avers, solve all our problems however it may present a platform for exploring other absences, not only the absence of performance poetry. Readings is not alone in highlighting the necessity of this work. In his 2004 essay 'Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern'³²² the critic Bruno Latour discussed the renatured role of the academic in the context of twenty-first century global and social information structures. Latour signals the potential dangers of an academy which has grown out of touch by allowing its criticism to fail in meaningful dialogue, and to construct and deconstruct social issues in ways which affirm neither its own value nor the value of objectivity as fact.³²³ In response Latour counsels the contemporary academy to re-evaluate its critical tools - 'there is no greater intellectual crime than to address with the equipment of an older period the challenges of the present one'³²⁴ - and a product of such re-evaluation is that absences previously acknowledged may be examined and resolved. Accepting the centrality of the physical, bodily experience in performance poetry, arguments for a pedagogical platform of spoken word and performance are analogous to Latour's insistence that 'the question was never to get away from facts but closer to them, not fighting empiricism but, on the

³²² Bruno Latour, 'Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern', in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 30. Issue. 2 (2004), pp.225-248.

³²³ As Latour questions: 'While we spent years trying to detect the real prejudices hidden behind the appearance of objective statements, do we now have to reveal the real objective and incontrovertible facts hidden behind the illusion of prejudices? And yet entire Ph.D. programs are still running to make sure that good American kids are learning the hard way that facts are made up, that there is no such thing as natural, unmediated, unbiased access to truth, that we are always prisoners of language, that we always speak from a particular standpoint, and so on, while dangerous extremists are using the very same argument of social construction to destroy hard-won evidence that could save our lives' (Latour, 'Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?', p.227).

³²⁴ Latour, 'Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?', p.231.

contrary, renewing empiricism'.³²⁵ These arguments find particular resonance considering that, as I discuss in my next chapter, Latour privileges the importance of the body as an interface to engage, process, and learn from affective experiences. The powerful potential of engagement with (rather than suppression of) the body opens academic discourse to degrees of value which have been hitherto circumscribed.³²⁶ In the context of such increased attention to new avenues of critique, a productive rather than a restrictive act, my next chapter investigates how the body may be educated through the performance of poetry, and subsequently the roles that affect and bodily experience play in this education.

³²⁵ Latour, 'Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?', p.231.

³²⁶ This is made manifest in the candour of Latour's statements regarding the necessity of transforming the role of the critic: 'The critic is not the one who debunks, but the one who assembles. The critic is not the one who lifts the rugs from under the feet of the naive believers, but the one who offers the participants arenas in which to gather... if something is constructed, then it means it is fragile and thus in great need of care and caution' (Latour, 'Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?', p.246).

Chapter two

Affect and Performance Poetry

My analysis of affect in the proceeding chapter discusses the transmission of affect between bodies during the performance of poetry, as well as the advantages this presents for a defence of performance as a medium of receiving poetry. In line with my presentation of a pedagogy of performance poetry in my previous chapter I submit that a critical implication of performance poetry is the education of our affective drives. Spoken word, and the attendant transmissions and transactions, actively benefits its audience by providing a locus for the education of our bodies. To expand: the dialogue between the body of the performer and the body of the recipient, or recipients, can be reconstructed by the performer's body once established that the performer's body is an exemplary site of affect negotiation.

To outline the structure of my analysis, I introduce the notion of affect, the force which: 'arises in the midst of inbetween-ness: in the capacities to act and be

acted upon'³²⁷ and shapes how individuals manifest emotional responses to stimuli. In the context of performance poetry two things must immediately be addressed. First, that affect transmission does not solely originate from the performer rather it involves both the performer and the audience acting in correspondence. Second, that the notion of a live, bodily, material engagement with poetry immediately recalls the page and stage binary evoked in my previous chapter. In response to the latter query I discuss the work of Peter Kivy, specifically his 2006 text *The performance of reading: an essay in the philosophy of literature*.³²⁸ Kivy posits that the experience of private, silent reading is as much a performance as the oral performance of poetry encountered in spoken word: rather than an engagement between performer and audience it is a performance to oneself. I contest Kivy's presentation of performance as it fails to encompass affect which I believe to be a necessary element of all performances of poetry. To counter his assertions I analyse Walter Ong's 1980s critique of primary and secondary orality³²⁹, and Gilbert Ryle's suggestion that the notion of performing to oneself is a category mistake, articulated in his 1949 text *The Concept of Mind*.³³⁰ Ultimately I assert that Kivy's attempts to renegotiate the dialectic between page and stage, or the poetry performance and the reading of poetry, by creating one single ontology (reading as performance) are frustrated by the fact that there can be no complete parity

³²⁷ Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, 'An Inventory of Shimmers', in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. by Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp.1-25 (p.1).

³²⁸ Peter Kivy, *The performance of reading: an essay in the philosophy of literature* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006).

³²⁹ Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1982).

³³⁰ Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000).

between the two. What sits between them and maintains the distance is the structural vitality of affect in performance.

To consider the distinctions between page and stage poetry in the context of affect studies is to encounter other complications which surround contemporary spoken word, namely that awareness of affect is often the most criticized element of performance poetics. But to accept the trivialization of performance poetry as uncomfortably confessional or polemical soap-box rhetoric is to obviate interest in understanding the mechanism of affect in performance. Adopting C.M. Bowra's critique of the relationship between politics and poetics³³¹ I contend that all performance is an act of persuasion, however this need not be the didacticized persuasion that is commonly associated with spoken word. Rather this is a nuanced persuasion which relies on affect. Crucially this posits affect not as a blunt, one-sided tool of emotive persuasion but a neutral site of potential. Failing to take into account this negotiating element of neutrality would be arguing solely from the site of affect's consequences, and by positing a logic independent from the process, misinterpreting the role of affect. In defence of affect's neutrality, I discuss the work of Roland Barthes³³² and Bruno Latour³³³ engaging with the complex, multi-faceted role affects play in the bodily engagement between individuals, foregrounded by the inclusion of comments taken from an interview I conducted with a contemporary performance poet discussing the potential negative

³³¹ C.M. Bowra, *Poetry and Politics 1900-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966).

³³² Roland Barthes, Thomas Clerc and Éric Marty, *The Neutral* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

³³³ Bruno Latour, 'How to Talk about the Body? The Normative Dimension of Science Studies', in *Body and Society*, Volume 10 (2004), pp.205-229.

consequences of un-managed affective transmission. The first-hand evidence that can be taken from accounts of negative experiences of spoken word performance tacitly supports my argument for an increased attendance to a pedagogy of performance poetry as outlined in my first chapter.

Having established a position whereby one can accept the presence and the value of affect in spoken word performance beyond a simplified understanding of emotional excess I pursue the notion of affect as a pedagogical tool. In doing so I invoke the work of the seventeenth-century philosopher Baruch Spinoza.³³⁴ Spinoza is widely regarded in the field of affect studies to be a touchstone for the contemporary affective turn.³³⁵ His dictum that we have not yet determined what the body can do has been taken by affect theorists as a maxim for understanding affect's educative potential. Antonio Damasio's text *Looking For Spinoza* first published in 2003 identifies the various different approaches to Spinoza that have shaped scholarship about him, but ultimately foregrounds Spinoza's 'attempt to comprehend human beings and suggest ways in which their lives could be lived better'.³³⁶ The relevance of this avowal of betterment to the performance of poetry is the explicit, active presence of affective transmission that encompasses the entire experience of the performance. Exploring more contemporary approaches to affect, particularly the theories of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (themselves

³³⁴ Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics; On the Correction of Understanding*, trans. Andrew Boyle (London: Everyman's Library, 1959).

³³⁵ See, for example: Marjorie Levinson, 'A motion and a spirit: Romancing Spinoza', in *Studies in Romanticism* Vol. 46. Issue. 4 (2007), pp.367-400; Stuart Pethick, *Affectivity And Philosophy After Spinoza And Nietzsche* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Susan Ruddick, 'The Politics of Affect: Spinoza in the Work of Negri and Deleuze', in *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 27. Issue 4 (2010), pp.21-45.

³³⁶ Antonio Damasio, *Looking For Spinoza* (London: Vintage, 2004), p.8.

influenced by Spinoza) emphasises the importance of the role of affect in shaping our interactions: 'A body affects other bodies, or is affected by other bodies; it is this capacity for affecting and being affected that also defines a body in its individuality'.³³⁷ This rhetoric affirms the importance of performance poetry as a medium for better educating the body.

This pedagogical potential must of course be grounded in a clearer understanding of how exactly affect can transmit new experience or educate the emotions. In the final part of my chapter I investigate the mechanisms of transmission which shape our understanding of affect, and propose how these mechanisms intimately relate to the performance of poetry. This element of my analysis offers an in-depth study of Teresa Brennan's theories in her 2004 text *The Transmission of Affect*.³³⁸ Not only does Brennan ground an understanding of transmission, but she offers ways to approach criticism of affect transmission which elucidates an understanding of its application in the context of performance poetry. I submit that resistance towards the transmission of affect is delineated in Brennan's critical analysis in three forms: vagueness regarding the structure and definition of the 'crowd'; boundaries presented by sight-oriented conditions of objectivity; and fears of self-containment and threats to the subjective self. Of these three resistances it is the final, the threat to the subjective self, which most radically highlights the pedagogical implications of affect transmission. The capacity affect has to challenge the self-contained ego is determined by its pervasion.

³³⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus; Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p.625.

³³⁸ Teresa Brennan, *the transmission of affect* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

Against the weight of information affect provides the body, the ego must constantly struggle to retain self-containment, and against the pervasion of affect transmission and entrainment, the individual is forced to accede to the fact that their own body is not a contained article, but a structure constantly present to and within a social world. Evoking concepts of the ego facilitates an understanding of the role performance poetry plays in affective pedagogies. The experience of the spoken word performance is constituted affectively by the negotiations of the ego in the struggle against affective transmissions. In this respect, to recall my assertion that all performance is an act of persuasion, I posit a notional comparison between the way the poet persuades through performance, and the persuasions of affect upon the self-contained ego. Reinforcing the context of performance poetry's affective dimensions, experiential education is facilitated by the poetry performance, which offers a distillation of wide degrees of affect- allowing the body to interact with various affective forms and drives. Performance poetry thus presents itself as an exemplary tool for developing a pedagogy of affect.

Defining Affect

When one considers the performance of poetry in the context of poetry as a wider whole it is inevitable that a distinction occurs between participation in a performance of poetry and the solitary reading of poetry.³³⁹ Arguments against the

³³⁹ The critic Don Cusic argues strongly for the presence of such distinctions between modes of receipt: 'emphasis on entertainment and acknowledgment of the restrictions and limitations a live

value of making distinctions tend to question whether it is healthy practice to establish lines within and between poetry and poetics, bolstered by a belief that everything lying within the expanse of poetry is an indivisible part of the whole. These arguments are not without worth, and certainly the lack of fixity resulting from a reasonably vague and abstract definition of what poetry is affords the poet (a term which enjoys a similarly fuzzy designation) a space without nominal boundaries in which to pursue creative work. However, as important as preserving this freedom is for creative development, there is a practical necessity to identify distinctions between modes of poetry when there are clear differences in the way one receives them. These distinctions can be delineated experientially, and the differences that are raised can be understood by their impact upon both mind and body of the receiver. This impact is affective; it concerns the shifting field of forces and drives which direct our emotional associations with the world around us. As Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg articulate in their short but seminal essay 'An Inventory of Shimmers':

Affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces- visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion – that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability. Indeed, affect is persistent proof of a

audience presents a poet often disturbs those who emphasize the written word and feel poetry should be for quiet, solitary reading and not public performance' (Cusic, p.108).

body's never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world's
obstinacies and rhythms, its refusals as much as its invitations.³⁴⁰

Affect is the body and the mind's engagement in the world³⁴¹, it is simultaneously operating as a latent force and an active force which: 'arises in the midst of inbetween-ness: in the capacities to act and be acted upon'.³⁴² The impact of performance poetry, the force which emotionally colours our experience as recipients, is created by harnessing and directing affect to achieve the contextual intentions of the poem. It is a simple matter to commit the effects of performance poetry to this process, however it is critical to understanding the importance of affect within the transaction that the process not be relegated simply to a performance poet wielding affect as a blunt tool which leaves a specific, intended impact on their audience. To begin with, the range and intensity of affect is vast and totalizing.³⁴³ Inclination to understand it simply as an apparent, observable force misses the point of its absolute pervasion: 'it is quite likely that affect more often transpires within and across the subtlest of shuttling intensities: all the miniscule or molecular events of the unnoticed. The ordinary and its extra-. Affect is born in in-between-ness and resides as accumulative beside-ness'.³⁴⁴ To argue that the

³⁴⁰ Seigworth, p.1.

³⁴¹ This is robustly articulated in: Giovanna Colombetti, *The Feeling Body: Affective Science Meets the Enactive Mind* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 2014), which explores affect through a more scientific methodology than I intend to pursue, but is nevertheless a pertinent exemplar of affect's engagement with both the body and the mind: 'The study of the organism as a living system and the study of the organism as a subject of experience are not independent but need each other and should aim to complement each other productively.' (Colombetti, p.16).

³⁴² Seigworth, p.1.

³⁴³ The scale and the importance of affective engagement are explored in: Max Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy (Library of Conservative Thought)*, trans. by Peter Heath (Piscataway: Transaction Publishers, 2008). Scheler argues that affects are foundational to our value judgments; forming a crucial part of our phenomenal experience of the world.

³⁴⁴ Seigworth, p.2.

performance poet harnesses affect does not mean that the performance poet is solely responsible for generating the emotions felt by their audience. Affect is generated by both performer and audience participating in the stream of affect that operates within the space. The accumulation of affect through the performance, engaging with the social and spatial conditions which provide the performance context, is comprised of the exchanges of affect between performer and audience. These exchanges, or transmission are physical and bodily manifestations of affect felt or received as emotional reactions. Of course, performance poetry is an act of persuasion with the performer engaging rhetoric in an attempt to establish a certain emotional reaction. However, the way in which that reaction manifests is negotiated by both the performer and the audience, who jointly participate in the shifting structure of the affect, and the ways in which it enters the body and the mind.³⁴⁵

Affect and the page / stage binary

Establishing a binary between page and stage poetry (compounded by the inherent divisions in the structures of the mediums) is problematized by too sudden and too certain assertions regarding the role (or non-role) of affect in silent, personal

³⁴⁵ Seigworth outlines this relationship by describing affective transactions as related 'force-encounters' passing between bodies: 'affect accumulates across both relatedness and interruptions in relatedness, becoming a palimpsest of force-encounters traversing the ebbs and swells of intensities that pass between 'bodies' (bodies defined not by an outer skin-envelope or other surface boundary but by their potential to reciprocate or co-participate in the passages of affect)' (Seigworth, p.2).

reading. Regarding these assertions, I refer to the theories of Peter Kivy in his text

The performance of reading: an essay in the philosophy of literature:

I intend to pursue analogies between reading and performance: in particular, between reading to oneself novels and stories, and performing or experiencing performances of musical works. In doing so I hope to discover some things about our appreciation of silently read literary works, and, in the end, to show that reading and performance have more in common than common sense suspects.³⁴⁶

The common sense Kivy alludes to is the binary I identify between page and stage. Disassociating the performed poem from the page poem locates their alterity in the manner by which the two are received. I contend that this differentiation hinges on the role of affect in performance poetry; however, before this may be elaborated the value of Kivy's approach to renegotiating the comparative relationships between performance and silent reading must be assessed.³⁴⁷

Kivy's approach to reinterpreting the reading process begins with an attempt to resituate the language of performance within the act of reading.³⁴⁸ In the context of

³⁴⁶ Kivy, p.1.

³⁴⁷ I have elected to analyse Kivy's engagement with the page versus stage debate because he attempts to portray the reader as engaged in an act of performance (albeit without the affective capacities by which I determine performance). However, Kivy is not alone in discussing the role of 'voice' in the receipt of a poem. See, for example: James Logenbach 'The Spokenness of Poetry', in *The Resistance to Poetry* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004) pp.61-71. Logenbach argues that: 'to one degree or another, no poem extends the illusion of an individual speaker without challenging that illusion; at the same time, no poem, no matter how strenuous its challenge, manages to avoid the illusion of being spoken' (Logenbach, p.67). Of course this is a connected investigation, but the rhetoric it engages with, the impression of the receipt of a voice, locates the performance outside the reader thus highlighting Kivy's value in this debate as a critic engaging with the processes enacted by the reader.

³⁴⁸ Kivy is certainly not the only critic who proposes this. See also Peter Stockwell, *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002). Stockwell suggests that: 'cognitive poetics sees reading as a process in which the reader performs the act of reading.' (Stockwell, p.153).

his analysis reading is: 'an event taking up a certain non-continuous period of time. It is the kind of event we would describe as an act or an activity: it is an action performed by a reader. And the most important aspect of this act is that it is, or results in, an experience'.³⁴⁹ This statement constitutes a neat linguistic gambit which does not satisfactorily address what is being contested between performance and reading. The judicious appropriation of 'performed' glosses problematic elements of the relationship between the two mediums, simplifying the context by which performance can be suitably applied. However, Kivy's ontological approach offers an attempted justification for correcting the binary. Dichotomies between restraint and excess are formative to functionally negotiating how one's understanding of art is shaped. This dialectic has many names – Kivy approaches the relationship through the lens of Nelson Goodman's distinction between autographic and allographic arts.³⁵⁰ Autographic art (Apollonian restraint) is exemplified by painting or sculpture; that which is located in both spatial and temporal dimensions, whereas allographic art (Bacchic excess) governs music, drama, and performance – the live arts. Kivy's ontology pivots on a Platonic understanding of type and token in the context of both autographic and allographic and his understanding of a performance piece denotes that:

drama is among the allographic arts, and that its analysis, along Platonic lines, closely parallels that of music. The written text of the play is the

³⁴⁹ Kivy, p.5.

³⁵⁰ See Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1976).

‘score’ of the work; a performance of the play is a ‘score compliant’ and token of the type.³⁵¹

To re-contextualize, the script or text of a performance poem would be identified as the type – its tokens each individual performance of the poem. This logic holds for the allographic arts, however Kivy’s contention is that the autographic arts- in the context of the binary I analyse, the book of poems (for Kivy – the novel) - also engage with the interrelationship between type and token: ‘It would appear that the novel is a type. But what are its tokens?’.³⁵² Kivy’s argument evades the problem of establishing an artefact relationship with a text by positing that the tokens of a novel or a collection of poetry are, similar to a performance poem – its readings:

What I am suggesting, then, to bring out the major thesis of this section, is that the ontology of reading literary works is the type/token ontology of musical and dramatic works. But whereas the tokens of music, drama, and the other performing arts are performances, the tokens of read literary works are readings.³⁵³

The analogy between readings and performances Kivy presents anticipates the difficult territory of arguments historicizing the origins and traditions of the reading process as oral performance. Kivy correctly identifies the circumscriptions inherent

³⁵¹ Kivy, p.3.

³⁵² Kivy, p.4.

³⁵³ Kivy, p.5.

to drawing an analogy between reading and performance, an act he labels the 'genetic fallacy', and subsequently motions against:

I am well aware of the danger, in this regard, of committing the genetic fallacy of inferring that something must have certain properties or a certain character merely because its historical predecessors and sources had those properties or that character. I shall try very hard not to commit the genetic fallacy.³⁵⁴

Despite his attempts to defend his analysis against logical fallacies inherent in the conflation of oral cultures with contemporary performance practice, much of Kivy's approach to resituating an understanding of reading relies heavily on dispelling notions of the originary culture of read literature and replacing these notions with a problematic and not entirely satisfactory response. The niche Kivy identifies and responds to is stated in the following excerpt:

The whole history of fictional literature, until relatively recently, has been one stream only: the performance stream. And at some point, not much earlier than the early modern period, the stream diverged into two branches: the performance branch, properly so-called, and the read-to-yourself branch, with the modern novel as its centrepiece. How should we view this bifurcation?³⁵⁵

Kivy refers to the divergence between these two approaches as a drastic ontological break, a discontinuity between experiential modes of reception. Silent

³⁵⁴ Kivy, p.6.

³⁵⁵ Kivy, pp.17-18.

reading and the notion of the modern novel renegotiated the reader's relationship to literature by altering the ontology between text and performance, or rather creating a second ontology: 'After the advent of the silently read poem, and the modern novel, there were two: the work / performance and the work - ...? Aye: there's the rub. How are we to understand the second ontology?'.³⁵⁶ Kivy's proposed solution is to dispense with this bifurcation altogether by removing the latter, incomplete ontology. In order to achieve this, he resituates the 'read-to-yourself branch', the act of reading a text silently, as a performance to oneself:

all fictional literature, has been, for almost all of its history, a history of literature as performance, even when the literature has been 'read' in private by the solitary reader. For even then he was read to, or read aloud, performed aloud, to himself... Reading silently, viewed in this way, is not an ontological change from the work / performance ontology. It is just the next logical step, into a performance of a different kind, a silent performance but clearly recognizable as performance.³⁵⁷

As an approach to the relationship between read text and performance the contention that all fictional literature has been a performance and that the receipt of such, even when silently read, can be identified as performance has a number of problematic consequences. Not least among these consequences is the misconception that Kivy attempted to inoculate himself against by disavowing his

³⁵⁶ Kivy, p.18.

³⁵⁷ Kivy, p.18.

reliance on the conflation of oral tradition with contemporary performance practice. Kivy writes extensively about the emergence of literacy and, more specifically, the hegemony of our private relationship with the text. In his monograph he claims that the first recorded mention of private reading, not reading script in general but private reading (crucially in silence) is in *The Confessions Of Saint Augustine*, written between 397-398 AD.³⁵⁸ The connection between private reading of literature and reading in silence is of course important with regards to a shift in how readers receive poetry.³⁵⁹ The argument that performance can be conflated with a notion of the individual performing through silent reading is hampered by contending a fixed point at which silent reading became the fashion. Fixing this point invites criticism of Kivy because it fails to defend itself against the implication it harbours – that the analysis of literary receipt should be a diachronic analysis of successive periods of dominance.

As a touchstone³⁶⁰ for the analysis of a diachronic structure of development in the relationship between the oral and the literate I refer to the work of the Jesuit scholar and philosopher Walter Ong, particularly his 1982 text *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. Ong's position with regards to the relationship

³⁵⁸ This text has been translated and reprinted many times, though I refer to the 1988 translation by John K. Ryan: Augustine and John K Ryan, *The Confessions Of Saint Augustine* (New York: Image Books, 1988).

³⁵⁹ For a more robust historical study of the relationship between oral and literary cultures see: Jack R. Goody, *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

³⁶⁰ For example, see: Bruce E. Gronbeck, Thomas J. Farrell, and Paul A. Soukup (eds.), *Media, Consciousness, and Culture: Explorations of Walter Ong's Thought* (London: Sage Publications, 1991); Clarence Walhout, 'Christianity, History, and Literary Criticism: Walter Ong's Global Vision', in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 62. Issue No. 2 (1994), pp.435-459; Thomas J. Farrell, *Walter J. Ong on How and Why Things Are the Way They Are* (Brooklyn: Thought Catalog, 2014); Brian Street, 'A critical look at Walter Ong and the 'Great Divide'', in *Social literacies: critical approaches to literacy in development, ethnography and education* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp.53-63.

between orality – by which he means oral culture and oral tradition - and literacy – by which he means chirographic, written culture - takes into account a synchronic comparison. However, Ong emphasises that it is essential to approach the relationship diachronically, analysing successive historical periods: 'It is useful to approach orality and literacy synchronically, by comparing oral cultures and chirographic (i.e., writing) cultures that coexist at a given period of time. But it is absolutely essential to approach them also diachronically or historically, by comparing successive periods with one another'.³⁶¹ Ong's argument delineates a structure of orality and literacy whereby the oral traditions of cultural communication represent a primary orality. This is an orality completely unmitigated by the subsequent dominance of writing and the written word in cultural communication. Literacy, or the advent of a literate cultural society, arrives relatively late in human history; homo sapiens has been in existence for around 30,000 to 50,000 years – our most accurate estimate of the earliest existence of script dates from only 6,000 years ago. Corresponding with Ong's argument regarding primary orality, Kivy argues that the notion of reading in silence to oneself earlier than late in the 4th century was simply unknown. In the diachronic structure Ong describes the dominance of primary orality shifted to a focus on literacy and on writing, the reason for this being intimately tied with the power of symbols and of grapholects and how this relates to space. To quote from Ong's *Orality and Literacy*:

³⁶¹ Ong, p.2.

Writing, commitment of the word to space, enlarges the potentiality of language almost beyond measure, restructures thought, and in the process converts a certain few dialects into 'grapholects'. A grapholect is a transdialectal language formed by deep commitment to writing. Writing gives a grapholect a power far exceeding that of any purely oral dialect. The grapholect known as standard English has accessible for use at least a million and a half words, of which not only the present meanings but also hundreds of thousands of past meanings are known. A simply oral dialect will commonly have resources of only a few thousand words, and its users will have virtually no knowledge of the real semantic history of any of these words. But, in all the wonderful words that writing opens, the spoken word still resides and lives.³⁶²

The spatial materiality of written language, what might be called the space on the page, offers a level of potential for homogeneity and for posterity. The caveat Ong offers; that the spoken word resides and lives in all writing, indicates a denouncement of the strict dominance of literacy over the structures of orality which govern societal and cultural communication. This dominance bears out in the critical presence (or absence) of spoken word demonstrated by my analysis of the role performance practice has played in determining the value of performance poetics within the academy. Ong refers to this division in the conventional analysis of literature, positing:

³⁶² Ong, pp.7-8.

Yet, despite the oral roots of all verbalization, the scientific and literary study of language has for centuries until quite recent years, shied away from orality. Texts have clamoured for attention so peremptorily that oral creations have tended to be regarded generally as variants of written productions of, if not this, as beneath serious scholarly attention. Only recently have we become impatient with our obtuseness here.³⁶³

Of course, it must be recognized that *Orality and Literacy* was written three decades ago and it would not thus be unfair to say that Ong's observations, particularly regarding recent scientific and literary study, are dated.³⁶⁴ However in the diminution of oral creations as variants of the written, there is a marked correspondence with the relationship that performance poetry holds in the contemporary academy as explored in my previous chapter. Indeed, to build on this exploration, Ong's mistrust of the hegemony of New Criticism in particular is delineated alongside ideas which challenge the consensus of New Critical thought and its placing of the text at the centre of critical study:

The orality-to-literacy shift throws clear light on the meaning of the New Criticism as a prime example of text-bound thinking. The New Criticism insisted on the autonomy of the individual work of textual art... The New Critics have assimilated the verbal art work to the visual

³⁶³ Ong, p.8.

³⁶⁴ For a more contemporary analysis of Ong's work see the 2007 special issue of *Communication Research Trends* quarterly review entitled 'Orality and Literacy 25 Years Later': Paul A. Soukup, 'Orality and Literacy 25 Years Later', in *Communication Research Trends*, Volume 26. Issue No. 4 (2007), pp.1-44.

object-world of texts rather than to the oral-aural event-world. They have insisted that the poem or other literary work be regarded as an object, a 'verbal icon'. It is hard to see how this visualist-tactile model of a poem or other verbal creation could apply effectively to an oral performance, which presumably could be a true poem.³⁶⁵

The final remark in this excerpt demonstrates Ong's position regarding the purity of primary orality and its productions; 'true poems'. Ong's theories situating primary orality as pure orality, pre-dating literate modes of representation and communication anticipate a necessary post-literate turn towards what Ong unsurprisingly refers to as secondary orality. Primary orality represents a cultural communication completely untouched by written grapholectics, with no knowledge of writing or print. Ong contends that in a post-literate world we simply cannot return to primary orality, which one could posit is thus now functionally extinct. Secondary orality, and the recent turn towards oral cultural communication which comprises and is made manifest by performance poetics, must take into account the contemporary world; a high-technology culture, with a new orality regulated by telephones, television, the radio, and other electronic devices which function orally but rely on an understanding of writing and print. What this means in the context of Kivy's analysis is that the argument made for the idea of a post-literate, secondary oral culture's performance in the silent reading of written text being alike to the mechanisms of a traditional oral culture's performance is untenable. If, as Kivy contends: 'all fictional literature, has been, for almost all of its history, a history of

³⁶⁵ Ong, p.160.

literature as performance, even when the literature has been 'read' in private by the solitary reader'³⁶⁶ there is no accommodation made for the fact that oral culture prior to the introduction of the written word into the societal sphere does not and cannot resemble the secondary orality of a post-literate community. The very notion thus of a sublimation of the oral traditions of poetry into the conventions that govern receipt of written poetry is problematized by the diachronic intercession of a period where literacy dominated cultural communication.

Whereas Kivy locates the relationship between voice and text in a fixed Platonic dialectic, Ong provides a more mutable interpretation of Plato. Ong suggests that despite the fact that Plato exhibits misgivings about literacy and the written word his objections are contained within written text, a technological transformation of the original spoken word: 'Plato's entire epistemology was unwittingly a programmed rejection of the old oral, mobile, warm, personally interactive lifeworld of oral culture (represented by the poets, whom he would not allow in his Republic)'.³⁶⁷ Akin to Ong's description of the relationship between primary and secondary orality, this transformation represents a reflexive internalization of an external process where the technology of the written word becomes the means by which individuals internally process communication. To take this argument further, Ong suggests that the entire notion of Platonic form

³⁶⁶ Kivy, p.18.

³⁶⁷ Ong, p.80.

which Kivy ascribes as type; within the domain of the allographic 'live' art, is underwritten by a rejection of orality:

Platonic form was form conceived of by analogy with visible form. The Platonic ideas are voiceless, immobile, devoid of all warmth, not interactive but isolated, not part of the human lifeworld at all but utterly above and beyond it. Plato of course was not at all fully aware of the unconscious forces at work in his psyche to produce this reaction, or overreaction, of the literate person to lingering, retardant orality.³⁶⁸

In the context of a rejection of Kivy's notion of silent performance of text through reading Ong highlights the detachment of written text from the 'human lifeworld'. This critique of the relationship between orality and literacy when placed alongside Kivy's theories seems to destabilize the argument Kivy makes for a text's performative potential. This being said, Ong presents a compelling defence of this potential in the paradox of a dead text communicating living orality. By way of an elucidating analogy he compares the pressing of dead flowers between the pages of a book to the representation of life through fixed, dead text: 'The dead flower, once alive, is the psychic equivalent of the verbal text'.³⁶⁹ Here Ong makes an apparent concession to the kind of thought which mobilizes in Kivy's theoretical approach to text and performance. An oblique comparison can be drawn between Kivy's notion of the silent reader's constant performance to their self and Ong's description of the performative potential engendered by the timeless fixity of the written word:

³⁶⁸ Ong, pp.80-81.

³⁶⁹ Ong, p.81.

‘The paradox lies in the fact that the deadness of the text, its removal from the living human lifeworld, its rigid visual fixity, assures its endurance and its potential for being resurrected into limitless living contexts’.³⁷⁰ Ong relies heavily upon the term ‘human lifeworld’ to shore up his distinction between dead text and living orality. The concept of lifeworld here relates to a phenomenological understanding of lived experience first presented by Edmund Husserl in 1936 as a coherent universe of existing objects which form the basis of shared human existence.³⁷¹ This shared horizon of experience is the background upon which all humans live. It is necessary at this juncture to foreground the potential relationship between an affective understanding and a phenomenological understanding of the performance poem as phenomenology forms an important methodological element of my later analysis of the experience of the spoken word event within a performance space. I contend that the phenomenological notion of a lifeworld that Ong impels his reader to consider is inseparable from the world of affective experience.³⁷² Ong delivers a description of the lifeworld which grounds it in the negotiations between beings and bodies:

In the absence of elaborate analytic categories that depend on writing
to structure knowledge at a distance from lived experience, oral

³⁷⁰ Ong, p.81.

³⁷¹ See: Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), pp.108-109.

³⁷² This can be further supported by various alternatives to the Kivy model of reading as performance which foregrounds affect in the reading process. For example, in A.E. Housman’s 1933 lecture ‘The name and nature of poetry’ Housman suggests that the feeling experienced by the poet is transfused into the poem and the reader then enacts a process of tracing the feeling back, sensing a ‘vibration corresponding to what was felt by the writer’ (Housman, p.12). This feels unsatisfactory as an explanation precisely because the affective experience (a bodily experience) cannot be easily accommodated within the ‘feeling’ which Housman gestures towards. This would require the interaction of performer and audience within a performance space. (A.E. Housman, *The Name and Nature of Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935)).

cultures must conceptualize and verbalize all their knowledge with more or less close reference to the human lifeworld, assimilating the alien, objective world to the more immediate, familiar interaction of human beings.³⁷³

By dint of Ong's reference to the absence of writing categories that structure knowledge one can infer quite clearly that in this context Ong is referring to a culture of primary orality. However, I propose that Ong's argument, which separates the lifeworld from the technological world, interpolates a binary which can also be applied to a contemporary culture of secondary orality. Despite the necessary conflation of orality and literacy which hallmarks secondary orality, an argument for the disruptive potential of literate culture in the context of contemporary performance poetics is not diminished. Ong is not seeking to obfuscate any of the consequences of maintaining a binary between the lifeworld of the oral and the dead artificiality of the written text when he refers to this disruptive potential synchronically (timelessly) rather than as a fixed threat to primary orality: 'A chirographic (writing) culture and even more a typographic (print) culture can distance and in a way denature even the human'.³⁷⁴ Critics of contemporary performance poetry must therefore not fail to address the issues Ong raises, or obviate their relevance simply on the grounds that Ong's primary orality provides a perfect academic landscape; one which can be contested, but never actualized (because it is, as I contended, functionally extinct). The disruption of the literate exists as much in the context of contemporary secondary orality as it

³⁷³ Ong, p.42.

³⁷⁴ Ong, p.42.

did when it operated as the threat which extinguished primary orality: 'Writing is an even more deeply interiorized technology than instrumental musical performance is. But to understand what it is, which means to understand it in relation to its past, to orality, the fact that it is a technology must be honestly faced'.³⁷⁵ This is the precise point where affect can be inferred in the debate surrounding the oral and the literate. Resonant with the notion of lifeworld Ong establishes, affect provides a platform to understand the distinction between the internalized and the externalized, or rather the natural and the technological: 'There is no way to write 'naturally''.³⁷⁶ To clarify, Ong finds a correlative naturalness in the oral which cannot be identified in the written:

Oral speech is fully natural to human beings in the same sense that every human being in every culture who is not physiologically or psychologically impaired learns to talk... Writing or script differs as such from speech in that it does not inevitably well up out of the unconscious.³⁷⁷

This unconscious, natural process is certainly related to affect in a way that the written is detached from. This is because the oral (as a communicative gesture) mandates the presence of more than one individual, which necessarily creates a field for affective negotiations, whereas written communication such as page poetry can communicate abstracted from the exchange of affect on the level of a technological intervention. Of course arguing for the separation of silent, solitary

³⁷⁵ Ong, p.83.

³⁷⁶ Ong, p.82.

³⁷⁷ Ong, p.82.

reading from the exchanges of the liveworld of performance necessarily returns to Kivy, who destabilizes the 'common sense' approach of rendering performance and text distinct, replacing this understanding with what he proposes is a more nuanced depiction of the act of reading.³⁷⁸ However, Kivy's rhetoric here can be challenged as a 'category mistake' a term first articulated by the philosopher Gilbert Ryle in his 1949 text *The Concept of Mind*.³⁷⁹ Ryle furthered this analysis in a later text *On Thinking* (1979) expressing the idea that performing 'to oneself' is a category mistake:

We look through his caravan window and see the circus clown or the conjuror going through his capers or his prestidigitations in solitude. I suppose we might, though I doubt if we really would say that he is clowning or conjuring to himself, but can he literally be amusing or mystifying himself...?³⁸⁰

Ryle's contention is accurate, and while Kivy attempts in the course of his monograph to propose that an individual can be their own audience, he predicates his rhetoric with the disclosure that: 'Of course, in performing to yourself there are many things you can't do, among them those things that you can't do to or for yourself'.³⁸¹ Attempts to renegotiate the dialectic between page and stage,

³⁷⁸ Interestingly, this is a step Peter Stockwell simply refuses to take in *Cognitive Poetics*: 'We can use the metaphor to talk of readers performing the processing of poetry or prose, and can also talk of the performative aspects in these modes of writing, but drama is literally performed and is closer to a pre-literate existence' (Stockwell, p.158). This rhetoric clearly calls to mind a Leavisian refusal to accommodate performance within the same sphere of study as literature (poetry and prose).

³⁷⁹ Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000).

³⁸⁰ Gilbert Ryle, *On Thinking*, ed. by Konstantin Kolenda (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1979), p.35.

³⁸¹ Kivy, p.15.

performance and reading, creating one single ontology - are frustrated by the fact that there can be no complete parity between the two. What sits between them and maintains the distance is the structural vitality of affect in performance. Kivy's statement regarding the problem of containing the totality of the reading experience within his approach points directly towards affect, which as I argue in this chapter, is responsible for answering what can be done to and for the self and how it can be done.

To return to the initial contention: the capacity to witness, to observe a performer drawing upon and engaging with affect allows an audience to recognize and to similarly encounter affect, it awakens: 'a body's capacity to affect and to be affected'.³⁸² When one considers the relationship between performance and print poetry, and the identities of these elements within the wider body of poetics, it is apparent that a distinction can and should be made between the two. There is an experiential difference that must be explored in order to justify analysis of performance poetry as a distinct mode of poetry, and it is affect and the study of affects which provides a way to critically understand this difference.

Performance as persuasion

Affect studies however, with respect to alternative major critical camps which engage with the question of how to value the experience of literature, is recent,

³⁸² Seigworth, p.2.

nascent, and far from an authoritatively established model. There is a certain mistrust of affect as a critical mode: 'first encounters with theories of affect might feel like a momentary (sometimes more permanent) methodological and conceptual free fall. Almost all the tried-and-true handholds and footholds for so much critical-cultural-philosophical inquiry... become decidedly less sure and more nonsequential'.³⁸³ Affect falls foul of the classic and inflexible pedantry of the critic who will not bend to allow any question left intentionally unanswered. There must be a distinct, observable, measurable, and demonstrably infallible response to the interrogation of each stage of the argument, or the theory collapses. The imprecision of affect- the lack of a neat and quantifiable taxonomy is impermissible: 'Because affect emerges out of muddy, unmediated relatedness and not in some dialectical reconciliation of cleanly oppositional elements or primary units, it makes easy compartmentalisms give way to thresholds and tensions, blends and blurs'.³⁸⁴ In addition, when considering affect within the context of performance poetry mistrust is further compounded. Reiterating the argument that performance poetry is an act of persuasion, and that rhetoric is utilized by the performance poet to direct affect, brings spoken word perilously close to the insubstantial didacticism so often used as justification for attacks on the value of performance poetry as a genuine mode of receiving and understanding poetry.

To accept this impression of performance poetry's rudimentary and uncomfortable didacticism is to obviate interest in understanding the mechanism of affect in performance. In order to appreciate the role affect plays in shaping

³⁸³ Seigworth, p.4.

³⁸⁴ Seigworth, p.4.

performance poetry, it is vital to first understand the substance of performance poetry. As C. M. Bowra argues in his text *Poetry and Politics*: 'The essence of this poetry is that it deals with events which concern a large number of people... It is thus the antithesis of all poetry which deals with the special, individual activity of the self'.³⁸⁵ Of course, the modern day performance poet will often rely heavily on their individual self during both the creative process and the presentation of the complete piece. The performance of poetry is the projection of an identity, and this identity underpins any rhetorical content within the poem.³⁸⁶ However, the potency of this identity is derived from the recipient's capacity to empathize with the affective tenor of the experience therefore demonstrating their ultimately public nature. Bowra comments on the loss of the public voice, or rather, speaking to the public with the intention of coaxing affect into familiar shapes: 'To younger poets mystical or metaphysical assumptions on any large scale are unwelcome because they claim too much and are incapable of verification. It is safer and often more honest to keep clear of them and to confine oneself to what is known'.³⁸⁷ Once again, suspicion and mistrust is mediated by an unwillingness to accept what is not quantifiable, that an unprovable feeling can be afforded a potency measured by our capacity to recognize and empathize with it regardless of its seemingly unique and individual source: 'In [poetry] the transformation has been from a desire to be comfortably universal to a conviction that only through a very precise attention to

³⁸⁵ Bowra, p.2.

³⁸⁶ For further discussion of the notion of authenticity in performance, and the authentic identity of the performer see Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell's 1999 collection of essays *Performance and Authenticity in the Arts*, in particular pp.195-272: Kemal, Salim, and Ivan Gaskell, *Performance and Authenticity in the Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

³⁸⁷ Bowra, p.67.

particulars can it be anything at all'.³⁸⁸ This comfortable universality is where the vitality of affect the performer engenders must engage the audience or fail to move them. In the vague generality of such relatively weak affective commitment the audience finds little purchase, and no way to vitalize the experience of the poem through affect or through empathetic resonance.³⁸⁹ The real potential of performance poetry lies in the experiences which catch the audience within a strong and shared affective field the audience can commit to.

When this strong, shared affect is not established however, performance poetry as a mode or an art form intrinsically connected to public address diminishes itself upon an audience who cannot but be disenchanted by their underwhelming lack of participation in the process. This manifests in the tendency of critics to misconstrue performed public poetry as uninspired didacticism. For the modern poet who has moved against the uncomfortable rhetoric of public address, mistrusting any claims that can be made to universal affective experience, poetry must recede to that which is personal, and that which by virtue of its being the poet's own sentiment cannot be expressed, and subsequently recognised as a universal truth: 'Instead of moving outwards in pursuit of unfamiliar universes, [poetry] moves inward to unexamined recesses of the self. In the end it may find something universal, but this is not to be sought as such in the first instance'.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁸ Bowra, p.70.

³⁸⁹ Further discussion of this vitality and the relationship between performer and audience from the perspective of the performer can be found in: Paul Munden, and Stephen Wade, *Reading the Applause: Reflections on Performance Poetry by Various Artists* (York: Talking Shop, 1999).

³⁹⁰ Bowra, p.70.

To argue that all performance poetry is an act of persuasion appears to facilitate arguments for the trivial, uninspired didacticism inherent in less sympathetic views of performance poetry. The performance poet appears didactic in the sense that his or her motive is to provoke and persuade the audience to feel as the poet is feeling by a process of empathy, or to direct their audience to a certain feeling by utilizing their mastery of rhetorical structures and devices. However, this form of persuasion is not didactic as it relies on the participation of the audience in a co-transaction of affect. Didacticism, used in a pejorative sense, is vilified in the context of performance poetry because when adopted it overwhelms and governs the perspective of the audience. A common criticism of performance poetry is that it appears to fundamentally lack the challenge presented by page poetry, which in its profound state offers itself as a terser, more opaque, and more interesting experience. Critics of performance poetry, particularly those critics who identify with the new Modernist avant-garde poetry of the latter half of the twentieth century and beyond, reliably stick to condemnation of the transparency of the medium, one which does the work for the audience by telling them how to feel, by believing in the value of the public experience of the private as a vehicle for motivating affect. Such critics believe that by denying the audience the challenge and the puzzle of the poem, the performance poem is nothing more than an indulgence, one which cannot become anything with potential. Had the recipient, the reader of the poem participated in the process, unpicking the puzzle, joining the scatter of dots, undertaking and achieving the journey of approaching the poem's intention, then perhaps, with a symbiotic gestation of achieved understanding rather than an objective answer, the potency of the poem might manifest. The

recipient of the performance poem however, can do nothing more than receive the didactic message of the poem, regardless of the calibre of the performance. In conceiving of the page and stage debate in this manner, the ideological argument dictating contemporary study and appreciation of performance poetry is unmasked, for though certain strands of New Poetry and contemporary studies of poetics may valorise subjective doubt, in contrast the performance poet may twist and turn, but the one thing the performance poet must not do is refuse the audience an answer. To do so is to fail to engage with a clear affective goal, and to replace public rhetoric and persuasion with a challenge, one which crucially takes time. Though this type of poem, one which its reader must take necessary time with, certainly has merit, when rendered as a performance due to the constraints of the medium it falls flat.³⁹¹ Of course the space allowed for lengthier exegetical interpretation of a page poem does find comparison in the manner in which the performance poem persists in the memory of the audience and can be reflected upon after the fact. The argument I make here is that during the event of its reception a performance poem is offering an additional affective dimension. This does not mean that performance poetry is an inferior medium. The distinct flaw in such arguments regarding the nature of performance poetry is that participation within a poem should not be relegated simply to the solitary reader puzzling out the poet's intentions. One must not assume that performance poetry as a medium denies its recipient the participation which underpins the puzzle solving element of arguments favouring printed poetry, because the burden of work which the

³⁹¹ A pertinent discussion of the success of certain types of performed poems can be found in: Stanley Burnshaw, *The Seamless Web* (New York: George Braziller, 1970), pp. 288-290.

audience does undertake in the process of the performance poem is being done elsewhere, by affect.³⁹²

Barthes, Latour, and affective neutrality

The complexities of the web of affect indicated earlier in my analysis returns as the participatory element which negotiates the relationship between the audience and the performer. Crucial to this process is exposure both of the body, and to the body of the performer, and it is this aspect of the body (and the role it plays in the affective process) which requires further examination. Attempts to conceive of a priori postulations that situate affective transaction as a holistically beneficial process do not attend to the aforementioned complexities or to the fact that affect encompasses a varied and totalizing spectrum of engagements, which may or may not be positive:

As much as we sometimes might want to believe that affect is highly invested in us and with somehow magically providing for a better tomorrow, as if affect were always already sutured into a progressive or liberatory politics or at least the marrow of our best angels, as if affect

³⁹² A similar argument is offered by Heather Yeung in her text *Spatial Engagement with Poetry*: 'Our initial affective, aesthetic appreciation of the work is often overtaken by an analytic desire to bring it back to the level of the text; in the neat, closed, and mechanistic process of exegesis, we can easily forget our initial reaction to the work... In eliding and confusing these apparent divisions, we can move away from ideas of poetry that, in their logo- or grapho-centricism, or their reliance on structures of character and plot, do not accommodate the other life of poetry, as vocalized and vocal performance, and vice versa' (Yeung, p.62).

were somehow producing always better states of being and belonging – affect instead bears an intense and thoroughly immanent neutrality.³⁹³

It is important to acknowledge this, particularly in the context of performance poetry which is often couched as an emphatically positive experience for both audience and performer. In response to this issue I interviewed a contemporary spoken word poet; Azfa Awad Ali who has been involved with spoken word projects in the UK since 2013 when she auditioned for Apples and Snakes' 2013 project 'One Way Ticket'. Her latest project 'Map of Me' produced by Papertale Theatre in collaboration with Half Moon Theatre and Apples and Snakes South East³⁹⁴ presented her own real-life experiences as an asylum seeker told through a series of spoken word performances. Ali discussed the structure of the show and its two-year development, saying:

The backbone of the 50-minute show is poetry, and it is raw, emotional, personal poetry mostly written by myself. The show taught me how to be an actress and a poet at the same time without it looking like melodrama. Allowing the poetry to breathe, that was always the thing.³⁹⁵

When questioned about the content of the poetry Ali confirmed that the material was autobiographical, charting her own experiences seeking asylum in the UK:

³⁹³ Seigworth, p.10.

³⁹⁴ We Solutions, 'Map of Me (2015 – 16)', *Half Moon Young People's Theatre*, (2016) <<https://www.halfmoon.org.uk/about-us/history/production-archive/previous-half-moon-presents/map-of-me-2015-16/>> [accessed 17 May 2016].

³⁹⁵ Azfa Awad Ali, interviewed by Jack McGowan, 17 May 2016.

We sold it as based on real life stories. We did do research and development workshops with young people who had refugee backgrounds. We didn't end up using these experiences, but to save me from constant interrogation we did still market it as based on true life experiences from different refugees.³⁹⁶

In the process of developing, rehearsing, and performing real life traumatic experiences I enquired about the emotional relationship Ali developed with the show. Her response elucidated the problems that can occur when encountering affect:

It felt like a lot, like a two year process of doing the same show over and over again. After the first few performances I was done, but then there were more bookings and gigs, it got to the point where I completely resented it and I had to stop doing it. I resented the familiarity of it. I described it as peeling back a scab; annoying, painful, unnecessary. Other people haven't been through the emotional labour of the poetry: five years of poetry I have written, taken from different experiences from my childhood. It's like reliving a life for 50 minutes every show – it's a nightmare! If you haven't had the most amazing life, it's not something you really want to be doing.³⁹⁷

The experience Ali outlines is a manifestation of the transmission of affect between performer and audience; a mechanism which will be explored further in this

³⁹⁶ Ali, interviewed by Jack McGowan.

³⁹⁷ Ali, interviewed by Jack McGowan.

chapter. Discussing the physical reaction Ali had to performing the show, she indicated that the affect she experienced often expressed itself as a tension both on the stage and after the performance. When asked if that feeling was consistent she replied:

Every time I did the show, and after each performance period. I didn't understand what it was at the time and I think that made me angry, because I enjoyed doing the show, it's great to share my experiences with people. I have that cathartic process of letting go, but then it hits me back in the face. I'll feel something, this feeling in my throat. The next day it would be difficult for me to get up, sometimes I'd feel dizzy. I know what that feeling is now. Throughout the whole show I'm in character. But when I get home I'm Azfa again and all of those things which were art are now personal experiences that I need to absorb. Because I'm distancing myself while on stage it all comes flooding in as a rush. I've had to stop doing the show because I'm reliving trauma by doing it. It's all of these childhood experiences and it's heightened. You're in that moment, in every single experience: the taste, the sound, everything – again and again and again for 50 minutes at a time. Even performing poems which are cathartic you're reliving that trauma.³⁹⁸

Our discussion of the length of 'Map of Me' (and the potential compounding of the affective experiences over a 50 minute show) exhibits notable differences to the conventional spoken word performance, which is rarely as protracted. However, Ali

³⁹⁸ Ali, interviewed by Jack McGowan.

herself drew comparisons to the experience of shorter performances from both the perspective of a performer and an audience member, noting: 'One of the things you experience with a lot of spoken word poets is a constant tension, and when they're finished it's a huge slump and then you go away feeling overwhelmed, thinking about what they've said. It's too much sometimes'.³⁹⁹ When I interrogated the potentially cathartic element of the experience which Ali had eluded to in our discussion she responded: 'Sometimes when I write and I perform I go in with an optimistic perspective that if I share it with someone then I'm letting it go. But then it might come back to me in a different way that I don't recognize'.⁴⁰⁰ The fact that Ali gestures towards a distortion of the returning transmission of affect further reinforces the complicated web of affect which can determine the experience of a performance. Even when couched as a cathartic or redemptive expiation of feelings, Ali often found that the performance manifested a different bodily experience for her. Pursuing this notion of anticipated catharsis Ali affirmed:

Even when I was doing the show I knew why I was doing the show. I was so tired of holding onto my past, reliving it in my mind so I just wanted to write the story, perform it, let it go. I knew I was doing it for that purpose. I also need to keep myself safe in the process though. I did spend a majority of the time after the shows feeling sorry for myself and

³⁹⁹ In line with the multi-directionality of affect in spoken word Ali also acknowledged that: 'in a gig the audience will determine how the poem is performed, what I perform sometimes' (Ali, interviewed by Jack McGowan).

⁴⁰⁰ Ali, interviewed by Jack McGowan.

eventually I had to sit it out – I can't do the thing I love to do

(performance poetry) the way that I love to do it.⁴⁰¹

The notion of safeguarding which is explicit in Ali's experience of spoken word performance is vital evidence of the need to promote the pedagogical merit of performance poetry. Experiences of performance poetry educate both performer and audience, and increased attention to the experience of affect in performance under a pedagogical frame would be of great benefit to investigations into the potential wellbeing ramifications of affect.⁴⁰²

These wellbeing ramifications are of course grounded in the ways in which the body processes and manifests affect and it is important to stress that the affect itself remains neutral. To return to Seigworth's comments regarding the 'intense and thoroughly immanent neutrality'⁴⁰³ of affect, an assessment of affect as a negotiating element which fails to take into account this neutrality would be arguing solely from the site of affect's consequences, and by positing a logic independent from the process, misinterpreting the role of affect. One way of addressing this concept of neutrality is to draw on Roland Barthes' series of lectures *The Neutral*, delivered between 1977 and 1978, and first published in 2002. In these lectures Barthes approaches distinctions of neutrality, especially with regards to affect and affect transaction. Barthes' interest in poetry frames the value of his

⁴⁰¹ Ali, interviewed by Jack McGowan.

⁴⁰² Further to this, a recent article written by Dr. Lucy English (previously interviewed) published in June 2016 draws implicit connections between performance poetry and mental wellbeing. Lucy English, 'The growing popularity of performance poetry is a boost for mental wellbeing', *The Guardian Online*, 2 June 2016 <<https://www.theguardian.com/culture-professionals-network/2016/jun/02/performance-poetry-boost-for-mental-wellbeing>> [accessed 10 August 2016].

⁴⁰³ Seigworth, p.10.

theoretical approach to poetics. Of particular note is the relationship between 'readerly' and 'writerly' habits, terms Barthes employs to distinguish the experiential consumption of text, and that position him integrally within a critical discourse addressing engagement with poetry on and off the page. In response to the idea of the neutral, Barthes proposed 'a hyperconsciousness of the affective minimum, of the microscopic fragments of emotion... which implies an extreme changeability of affective moments, a rapid modification, into shimmer'.⁴⁰⁴ For Barthes, neutrality offered the presence of potential rather than the absence of designation. A neutrality implicating extant and established conditions, a fixed monochromatic greyscale, is distinguished from a neutrality constantly on the margin of determination, operating within a model of scaled and gradated intensity (as per the interrelationship between affective 'patterns'). As Barthes articulates: 'I define the Neutral as that which outplays (*déjoue*) the paradigm, or rather I call Neutral everything that baffles the paradigm'.⁴⁰⁵ Barthes offers a gambit which challenges the conventional paradigm of opposition between, or negation of, non-neutral positions. The neutral, encompassing a potentiality engendered by its non or pre-designation, is active: 'My definition of the Neutral remains structural. By which I mean that, for me, the Neutral doesn't refer to 'impressions' of grayness, of 'neutrality', of indifference. The Neutral – my Neutral – can refer to intense, strong, unprecedented states. "To outplay the paradigm" is an ardent, burning activity'.⁴⁰⁶ Within a situational context, the Neutral is placed between: 'only intervals, only the

⁴⁰⁴ Barthes, p.101.

⁴⁰⁵ Barthes, p.6.

⁴⁰⁶ Barthes, p.7.

relation between two moments, two spaces or objects'.⁴⁰⁷ These locations- the same interstitial spaces, are the territory of affect, of affect's 'inbetween-ness'.

Reading affect's neutrality within the context of Barthesian Neutrality, one may avoid simplifying affect by positing a new framework for affect analysis. Binary associations give way to a spectrum of potential states and progressive intensities. Out of Neutrality, and his study thereof, Barthes sought to postulate an ethical structure: 'All that: dispassionate apparatus of intellectual nature: the argument of the course + principles of exposition. It remains to bring out the truth of the course: the desire that is its origin and that it stages. The course exists because there is a desire for Neutral: a pathos (a patho-log?)'.⁴⁰⁸ Separating out the ethical investment particular to the project Barthes was engaged with he writes that: 'I add: a reflection on the Neutral, for me: a manner – a free manner- to be looking for my own style of being present to the struggles of my time'.⁴⁰⁹ What remains is a 'Patho-log?' which can be superimposed upon the affective drive, and the relationship between affect and the body. The neutral state of affect resonates with and against the experience of the body, as determined by what can be felt, what can be identified as issuing recognition from the body. Though in a state of neutrality, affect's intense and mutable potential anticipates the body in an: 'inventory of shimmers, of nuances, of states, of changes (pathè)'.⁴¹⁰ For Seigworth, Barthes' Neutrality presents an apt state of latency, and crucially, one which is dominated by a potential which employs creative faculties:

⁴⁰⁷ Barthes, pp.146-147.

⁴⁰⁸ Barthes, p.12.

⁴⁰⁹ Barthes, p.8.

⁴¹⁰ Barthes, p.77.

Here affect theory is, at one level, an ‘inventory of shimmers’ while, upon another register, it is a matter of affectual composition (in a couple of senses of the word ‘composition’ – as an ontology always coming to formation but also, more prosaically, as creative / writerly task). This is a passion for differences as continuous, shimmering gradations of intensities. Making an inventory (of singularities). And in the interval, is the stretching: unfolding a patho-logy.⁴¹¹

The dictum of Barthesian Neutrality suggests that the body, attuned to the developments and fluctuations arising out of affect has the potential to administrate the ‘inventory of shimmers’, to process via pathological response. Intensity or grades of potential within affect can be determined by the body. Reordering questions of neutrality and the undetermined nature of the complex array of affect, the body becomes a tool to anticipate and manage affect as one encounters it.

Affect studies reinforce the inter-relationship between mind and body, the necessity of the body in the process of engaging with emotions. Exploring the phenomenological construction of the physical self in his critical study *How to Talk about the Body? The Normative Dimension of Science Studies*, Bruno Latour states that: ‘to have a body is to learn to be affected... put into motion by other entities’.⁴¹² The prominence of performance poetry as a means to re-construct our understanding of poetry and our relationship as recipients is configured by the

⁴¹¹ Seigworth, p.11.

⁴¹² Latour, *How to Talk about the Body?*, p.205.

importance of the body as a tool to be used to access and process affect. By such an opening of the body individuals can educate themselves, accepting affect as a conditioning force not simply for an emotional education, but to condition their experiences as social and cultural beings. When the body is attuned to affect, the notion of bodily capacity as a contained, physical structure loosens in favour of the body as: 'an interface that becomes more and more describable when it learns to be affected by many more elements'.⁴¹³ Indeed Seigworth and Gregg's aforementioned essay 'An Inventory of Shimmers' serves as an introduction to a collection of critical essays which attempt to corral the fluid fragments of affect into a concerted study. Appropriating Barthes' ethical approach as a constructive design, the closest the critics come to a statement of intent serves as a reminder of the importance of utilizing the body not just in our critical faculties, but in our day to day life:

We would maintain that affect theories, whatever their multiple trajectories, must persistently work to invent or invite such a 'pathology' into their own singular instantiations- not only as inventory (though, heaven knows, sometimes that can be work enough) but also as a generative, pedagogic nudge aimed toward a body's becoming an ever more worldly sensitive interface, toward a style of being present to the struggles of our time.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹³ Latour, *How to Talk about the Body?*, p.205.

⁴¹⁴ Seigworth, p.12.

It is this belonging to the reality of life which shields performance poetry from the mode of criticism which questions its capacity to provoke challenging and valuable conceptual processes. The reward of solving the puzzle may be a powerful aspect of poetry, but within performance poetry where the tangible and the transparent is shifted into focus in favour of allowing the audience to firmly grasp intention before it slips away, space is created to allow the audience to engage more sharply with their identity as affective beings. Affect may be generated in all engagements of the human psyche, in every in-between of our existence as social and cultural beings; however, the potential of performance poetry is the power it affords to concentrate our affect, to drive forward our feelings unfettered by mystery and dissimulation. Though the hard won poem (the puzzle solved) may offer a richer, subtler, more complicated pattern of affect, the process required to reach the solution threatens the recipient's ability to feel the reality of the affect and its poignancy as a real experience.

The Spinozist imperative

The value of performance poetry, and the justification for its study lies in its capacity to offer an experience of the material exchange of affect – to witness affect shifting between performer and audience, to grasp the rhythms and flows of affect within a performance space. With clarity we experience the body as an active part of the affective process and gather together our own mental and physical

reactions as bodies participating within, and engaging with a shared affective field. This, not only as a poetic endeavour but a human practice, is a vital act. Foremost, affect must be connected to the real world, to feelings being bodily felt:

affect's impinging / extruded belonging to worlds, bodies, and their in-
betweens – affect in its immanence – signals the very promise of affect
theory too: casting illumination upon the 'not yet' of a body's doing,
casting a line along the hopeful (though also fearful) cusp of an
emergent futurity, casting its lot with the infinitely connectable,
impersonal, and contagious belongings to *this* world.⁴¹⁵

Theorists working within the tradition of affect studies as a critical field operate from a site which grounds affect in the real world, alive to changes between bodies, the practical application of felt affect. Critics engaging with affect studies as a critical mass, albeit a relatively nebulous mass, commonly cite Baruch Spinoza as a forefather of sorts for the responsibility of developing affect studies. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza maintains that: 'nobody as yet has determined the limits of the body's capabilities: that is, nobody as yet has learned from experience what the body can and cannot do'.⁴¹⁶ The inconclusive, not-yetness which characterizes our knowledge of the body sets us the task of engaging with ourselves as bodies, as sites of affect negotiation, and exploring our capacity to radically impose ourselves upon our surroundings. This can be contrasted to the closed challenge of the denser page poem, the puzzle to be solved. Of course the puzzle common to the page poem

⁴¹⁵ Seigworth, p.4.

⁴¹⁶ Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics; On the Correction of Understanding*, trans. Andrew Boyle (London: Everyman's Library, 1959), p.280.

offers a similar never-ness, there isn't a neat author's solution printed upside down on the back page of the collection, the challenge is rather for the reader to unpick the stitches and perhaps perceive through the pattern a potential possible which satisfies them. However, the dogged solipsism at the heart of this process hampers the live, animated, bodily dynamism of engaging with affect in reality, a sense of vibrancy which may justifiably stake its lot in performance poetry. The directive which lies at the heart of Spinoza's statement is made manifest: 'the unceasing challenge presented by Spinoza's 'not-yet,' conveying a sense of urgency that transforms the matter and matters of affect into an ethical, aesthetic, and political task all at once'.⁴¹⁷ Performance poetry undertakes this urgency by facilitating bodily engagement with affect, by literally providing a stage for affect to be experienced. Without doubt the frame of this undertaking, as Seigworth and Gregg accurately observe, does not anticipate a firm conclusion: 'But then, of course, Spinoza must have also understood that affect's 'not yet' was never really supposed to find any ultimate resolution... It is this Spinozist imperative, ever renewed by the 'not yet' knowing of affective doing that drives affect'.⁴¹⁸ It would be crude and not a little naive to posit performance poetry as a totalizing response to the challenge of realizing affect in poetry and poetics, however it may be the case that performance poetry, with its associated engagement with the physicality of the body and bodily processes makes an important contribution to addressing our understanding of affect, and how we can become more and better attuned to affect in our lives. Gathering together a gradated milieu of affects, the 'inventory of

⁴¹⁷ Seigworth, p.3.

⁴¹⁸ Seigworth, p.3.

shimmers', a rationalizing pattern begins to appear. With the emergence of such a pattern it is possible to gesture towards the limitless extent of our capacities as affective beings as a result of (and simultaneously beyond) the felt force of the strong emotional drives which are offered through performance poetry:

In the accumulation of gradient tweakings, one finds the simultaneous delivery of a bodily capacity and a world of sometimes near-infinitesimal difference: nurturing differences through affective relay into perpetually finer-grained (and concurrently enlarged) postures or comportments until there are only articulations of a world in its expressiveness: expressions that are only ever the interval between sensings or the stretching of this sensuous interval that comes to progressively produce (when successful) a passion for difference, where the pathology of a body meets the pedagogy of an affective world.⁴¹⁹

Of course, statements of an affective pedagogy in correspondence with the already established omnipresence of affect within collective life anticipate certain complications. Pushing against the role of performance poetry as a pedagogic mechanism is an already oversaturated field of everyday affective impulses vying to direct our senses. In the conclusion to his essay on the aesthetics of affect 'Bitter after Taste', Ben Highmore argues: 'It seems clear though that if our 'affect horizons' are the result of deep pedagogy, then an affective politics that wanted to expand the aesthetic realms of communities would need to champion an affective

⁴¹⁹ Seigworth, p.12.

counter-pedagogy ‘.⁴²⁰ If performance poetry can be a tool to effect changes in the affective awareness of an individual, a community, it must be distinguished from the ever present field of affect through which we engage with other bodies, and the suggestion of an ‘affect horizon’ or ‘realm’ governing the limits (sub-conscious, self-imposed) of our affective lives. This mass of affect, a contesting barrage of affective drives articulated by Lauren Berlant in her essay ‘Cruel Optimism’ as ‘the impasse of living in the overwhelmingly present moment’⁴²¹ presents a barrier to progressive development or refining of affect. Highmore’s solution is ‘the transformation of ethos through experiments in living... a form of experiential pedagogy, of constantly submitting your sensorium to new sensual worlds that sit uncomfortably within your ethos’.⁴²²

The subsequent difficulty encountered with this experiment in living is that it can be daunting to derive the value of sensory experientialism prior to experience itself, and therefore the individual or the collective body find themselves at a loss regarding how best to approach the responsibility of submission to new sensory encounters. I would contend that this is once again where performance poetry shows its strength as an affective medium. As a public art, an art engaged in the business of promoting new experience (the performer conducts a sensory experience within their own body and the body of their audience, one which is intended to surprise, to engage, to captivate) performance poetry can, in the

⁴²⁰ Ben Highmore, ‘Bitter after Taste: Affect, Food, and Social Aesthetics’, in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. by Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 118-138 (p.136).

⁴²¹ Lauren Berlant. ‘Cruel Optimism’, in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. by Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp.93-118 (p.116).

⁴²² Highmore, p.135.

creative act, access and direct new experiences. Writing on shame as an emotional state manipulating affect within the body, Elspeth Probyn contends:

Writing is a corporeal activity. We work ideas through our bodies; we write through our bodies, hoping to get into the bodies of our readers. We study and write about society not as an abstraction but as composed of actual bodies in proximity to other bodies.⁴²³

What Probyn articulates is the distinction between the affective construction of our everyday and the heightening of affect when purposed by certain activities:

‘Thinking, writing, and reading are integral to our capacities to affect and to be affected’.⁴²⁴ The desirability of performance poetry in aiding the expansion of our affective horizons may thus be found in its mutability. The difficulty of categorizing the live aspect of the performance, the capacity of the performer to shift between affective states and to manipulate affect within their audience contributes to its potential as a pedagogic tool. At the heart of this engagement is the body: ‘Simply put, writing affects bodies. Writing takes its toll on the body that writes and the bodies that read or listen’.⁴²⁵

Despite the confidence with which affect studies commends the body as an active part of the affective process, undetermined use of terms such as ‘body’ and ‘mind’ can ultimately prove problematic: ‘The challenge of the perspective of the affects resides primarily in the synthesis it requires. This is, in the first place,

⁴²³ Elspeth Probyn, ‘Writing Shame’, in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. by Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp.71-93 (p.76).

⁴²⁴ Probyn, p.77.

⁴²⁵ Probyn, p.76.

because affects refer equally to the body and the mind'.⁴²⁶ Affect, as referenced earlier in my analysis, concerns 'the capacities to act and be acted upon'.⁴²⁷ Not only is bodily action generated by affect, but affect anticipates our actions, as Michael Hardt proposes in his foreword, 'What are affects good for' in *The Affective Turn – Theorizing the Social* that '[Affects] illuminate... both our power to affect the world around us and our power to be affected by it, along with the relationship between these two powers'.⁴²⁸ To return to Spinoza⁴²⁹, Hardt suggests that Spinoza's theories should not be approached simply in terms of a bodily enquiry but an application of the mind:

[Spinoza] grasps the powers of the affects in terms of two set parallel developments or correspondences... the mind's power to think and its developments are, he proposes, parallel to the body's power to act. This does not mean that the mind can determine the body to act, or that the body can determine the mind to think. On the contrary, Spinoza maintains that mind and body are autonomous but that they nonetheless proceed or develop in parallel.⁴³⁰

The correspondences of these aspects of affective potential are vital to the drive which supplies performance poetry with its value. As well as a relationship between the body's power to act and the mind's power to think, a relationship which

⁴²⁶ Michael Hardt, 'Foreword: What affects are good for', in *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*, ed. by Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean O'Malley Halley (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), p.9.

⁴²⁷ Seigworth, p.1.

⁴²⁸ Hardt, p.9.

⁴²⁹ Baruch Spinoza, *Spinoza: Complete Works*, ed. by Samuel Shirley, and Michael L Morgan (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Pub., 2002).

⁴³⁰ Hardt, pp.9-10.

deconstructs the mechanism of action, the body is placed in a similar relationship with affect. This is a relationship which draws upon the mind's potential to receive affect and to translate it into a form which can be reciprocated by the body. Thus, the body's power to act also corresponds with the power to be affected. Antonio Damasio articulates the interrelationship between body and mind as fulcra in a single organism in his study of Spinoza's theories; *Looking For Spinoza*:

Emotion and related reactions are aligned with the body, feelings with the mind. The investigation of how thoughts trigger emotions and of how bodily emotions become the kind of thoughts we call feelings provides a privileged view into mind and body, the overtly disparate manifestations of a single and seamlessly interwoven human organism.⁴³¹

Having established a relationship of correspondence, it can thus be predicated that through the accretion of one's capacity to be affected – through exposure to performance poetry as a method of conditioning experiences of affect, the greater one's capacity to act becomes: 'the mind's power to think corresponds to its receptivity to external ideas; and the body's power to act corresponds to its sensitivity to other bodies. The greater our power to be affected... the greater our power to act'.⁴³² The importance of this practice, and thus the importance of performance poetry as a procedure which enables and facilitates experiences of

⁴³¹ Antonio Damasio, *Looking For Spinoza* (London: Vintage, 2004), p.7.

⁴³² Hardt, p.10.

affect in a diverse and heightened manner, corresponds to Spinoza's dictum 'not yet'. Though we can never reach a totality of understanding regarding the limits of the body's relationship with affect (the offered answer is never a complete answer) we must continue to grasp it. To reiterate, if it is within our capacity to do so, we must continually explore the unfathomable limits of our body, our mind, and the interrelationship therein: 'We do not know in advance what a body can do, what a mind can think – what affects they are capable of. The perspective of the affects requires an exploration of these as yet unknown powers. Spinoza thus gives us a new ontology of the human or, rather, an ontology of the human that is constantly open and renewed'.⁴³³ From the perspective of performance poetry the absence of a puzzle, the illusion of an easy answer - one freely offered by the performer - is precisely what illuminates the manifest contribution of the spoken word performance to a developing and shifting contemporary poetics. Performance poetry offers new experiences of affect, it asks its audience to yield to an introspection that is not born out of closed and solitary rumination but instead is founded in the public and in the social, in the body's capacity to experience other bodies, to participate within the experience, and to live the affect.

This living of affect, or rather the experience of affect as a vital element of lived experience, is crucial to the imperative Spinoza articulated. At the core of Spinoza's ontology of the human and his theoretical position towards affect one can find a particular attention to the relationship between affects and the human

⁴³³ Hardt, p.10.

condition: 'Spinoza saw drives, motivations, emotions, and feelings – an ensemble Spinoza called affects – as a central aspect of humanity. Joy and sorrow were two prominent concepts in his attempt to comprehend human beings and suggest ways in which their lives could be lived better'.⁴³⁴ In a spoken word performance the performer and the audience engage within a mutual relationship delineated by affect, both contributing to the participation of affect within the space. I posit that this dialogue between the body of the performer and the body of the recipient, or recipients, facilitates an understanding of lived experience and that the performance space may thus be understood as an exemplary site of affect negotiation.

Spinozist imperatives to live better impel a legacy of thought which could problematize the ordering of exemplary sites of affect and affect transaction in as much as Spinoza's decidedly human incitements towards a better life sit uncomfortably with the deconstruction of affect at a mechanical level. However, as Damasio's search suggests, attempts to categorise Spinoza meet with difficulty: 'The difficulty begins with the problem that there are several Spinozas with which to reckon, at least four by my count'.⁴³⁵ Damasio contends three dominant Spinozas; the radical religious scholar who 'proposes a new road to human salvation'; the political architect, 'the thinker who describes the traits of an ideal democratic state populated by responsible, happy citizens'; and the philosopher qua scientist who works through fact to establish 'a method of geometric

⁴³⁴ Damasio, p.8.

⁴³⁵ Damasio, p.14.

demonstration and intuition to formulate a conception of the universe and the human beings in it'.⁴³⁶ The fourth figure, who most keenly elucidates Spinoza's relationship with the mechanism, or materiality of affect transmission is: 'Spinoza: the protobiologist. This is the biological thinker concealed behind countless propositions, axioms, proofs, lemmas, and scholia'.⁴³⁷ It is this Spinoza who had most impact on the development of affect studies geared towards a deconstruction of the relationship between the mind and the body. In part two of Spinoza's *Ethics* the protobiologist Spinoza (the Spinoza engaged with an exploration of the ways in which affect negotiates mind and body) outlined his conception of the body through the following six postulates:

1. The human body is composed of very many individual parts of different natures, each of which is extremely complex.
2. Of the individual components of the human body, some are liquid, some are soft, and some are hard.
3. The individual components of the human body, and consequently the human body itself, are affected by external bodies in a great many ways.
4. The human body needs for its preservation a great many other bodies, by which, as it were [quasi], it is continually regenerated.
5. When a liquid part of the human body is determined by an external body to impinge frequently on another part which is soft, it changes the surface

⁴³⁶ Damasio, p.14.

⁴³⁷ Damasio, p.14.

of that part and impresses on it certain traces of the external body acting upon it.

6. The human body can move external bodies and dispose them in a great many ways.⁴³⁸

Parsing through these postulates to the core of the relationship between body and affect, it is clear that Spinoza favours an investigation of what is compounded in the idea of the body. As the first postulate suggests, the body is composed of multiple complicated elements, and as the third postulate suggests these individual elements, or components, are all affected externally by other bodies. This rationale has already located Spinozist thought around a locus of composition, where each component can be analysed for potential affective changes. When examined in these terms it becomes simpler to conceive of the idea that the Spinozist body is a mechanism of corresponding components which intersects with other bodies.⁴³⁹ I now retrieve the potential complication of Spinoza's vision of the ensemble of affects and their relative roles in shaping exemplary modes of living when offered against a non-qualitative notion of the body as a mechanism. Against this, I posit Spinoza's fourth postulate: '4. The human body needs for its preservation a great many other bodies, by which, as it were [quasi], it is continually regenerated'.⁴⁴⁰ Through this postulate one can reconcile the notion of the mechanism central to

⁴³⁸ Spinoza, *Ethics*, p.255.

⁴³⁹ To emphasize this Spinoza clarifies the importance of the interrelationship between bodies: 'All the modes wherein a body is affected follow from the nature of the body affected together with the nature of the affecting body (Ax. I after Cor. Lemma 3). Therefore, the idea of these modes will necessarily involve the nature of both bodies (Ax. 4, I). So the idea of any mode wherein the human body is affected by an external body involves the nature of the human body and the external body' (Spinoza, *Ethics*, p.256).

⁴⁴⁰ Spinoza, *Ethics*, p.255.

Spinoza's larger conception of the body with the enriching potential of the engagement between external bodies. Not only does Spinoza invoke the idea of preservation, but also regeneration. This language is critical to understanding how the body as mechanism can be translated by the human mind to fashion a comfortable co-existence with the imperative to live lives better. Spinoza contends that:

The human mind is the very idea or knowledge of the human body (Pr.1 3, II), and this idea is in God (Pr. 9, II) insofar as he is considered as affected by another idea of a particular thing; or, since (Post. 4) the human body needs very many other bodies by which it is continually regenerated, and the order and connection of ideas is the same (Pr. 7, 1)⁴⁴¹

Through the affective engagement of 'very many other bodies' in the performance poetry space the mind reorients understanding of the bodily mechanism as an enrichment. As Spinoza suggests, 'The human mind is the very idea or knowledge of the human body'.⁴⁴² Though the body may participate in a mechanical process of affect transmission and reception, for Spinoza the mind engages in a proprioceptive comprehension of these processes, the result being a means for the mind to translate affective transmissions as enrichment: 'The human body (Posts. 3 and 6) is affected by external bodies in a great many ways and is so structured that it can

⁴⁴¹ Spinoza, *Ethics*, p.258.

⁴⁴² Spinoza, *Ethics*, p.258.

affect external bodies in a great many ways. But the human mind must perceive all that happens in the human body (Pr.12, II)'.⁴⁴³ As will be further supported in my phenomenological analysis of the performance poetry experience later in my investigation, the relationship between body and mind and the ways in which affect actually affects the individual are not as simple as a binary between the two. However, this interpretation of Spinoza's thought allows one to come to terms with the problem of locating a mechanical conception of the material body alongside the dictum to live lives better in Spinoza's work.

Through my reading of Spinoza, reconsideration of the performance poet's body as an instructive element of the affective process expands to allow a conception of the process as a mechanism as well as reinforcing the qualities of performance poetry as a conditioner of affect. The implications of this are that a deeper analysis of how the body functions as a mechanism for affective engagement would be the next logical step. In her article, 'Political Economy, Biomedicine, and Bodies', Patricia T. Clough foregrounds her understanding of the affective body to critics who were themselves 'indebted to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Baruch Spinoza and Henri Bergson'.⁴⁴⁴ Alongside Spinoza, who has already proven vital to my analysis, Deleuze and Guattari present the body as a particular site of functions and pressures which, once dismantled, can be analysed in terms of its affective potential. Working within the context of affect through the tradition

⁴⁴³ Spinoza, *Ethics*, p.255.

⁴⁴⁴ Patricia T. Clough, 'Political Economy, Biomedicine, and Bodies', in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. by Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp.206-229 (p.207).

outlined by Spinoza's corresponding parallelism of the body and the mind, Deleuze and Guattari reify the body's place in the affective transaction. Discussing the body in *A Thousand Plateaus*, the second part of their landmark critical and philosophical project *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari suggest that:

A body is not defined by the form that determines it nor as a determinate substance or subject nor by the organs it possesses or the functions it fulfils. On the plane of consistency, a body is defined only by a longitude and latitude: in other words the sum total of the material elements belonging to it under given relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness (longitude); the sum total of the intensive affects it is capable of at a given power or degree of potential (latitude). Nothing but affects and local movements, differential speeds.⁴⁴⁵

The bodily organism functions as a machine within this analysis, though crucially it is configured as a developing, physical process as Karen Wendy Gilbert argues, 'for Deleuze and Guattari a machine is not a mechanical device but an ontic category in which heterogeneous linkages take place across phyletic times and zones'.⁴⁴⁶

Radicalizing the concept of the body to this transactional structure does not reduce it to a function-fulfiller, it simply renegotiates the language of the bodily process:

'The simplest daily activities – smelling, walking, playing a piano – require a

⁴⁴⁵ Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus; Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p.304.

⁴⁴⁶ Karen Wendy Gilbert, 'Slowness: Notes Towards and Economy of Différencial Rates of Being', in *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* ed. by Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean O'Malley Halley (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), p.88.

coordination of elements taken for granted. Deleuze and Guattari instead would speak of smelling as a 'smelling-machine' consisting of a nose-breath-flower-olfactory bulb assemblage'.⁴⁴⁷ Considering ways of orienting the body in relationship to how it negotiates its role within everyday functional transactions necessitates a re-examination of Latour's description of the body as an interface conditioned towards an ever increasing process of effectuated development. To learn to be affected is the role of the body: 'The body is thus not a provisional residence of something superior – an immortal soul, the universal or thought – but what leaves a dynamic trajectory by which we learn to register and become sensitive to what the world is made of'.⁴⁴⁸ The pertinence of this approach to a mode of study investigating one's capacity to direct the body towards affect is that it anticipates the space necessary to actively reconstitute the figure of the body around affect, to oil the machine towards a certain purpose.⁴⁴⁹

The determination of longitude and latitude explicated in Deleuze and Guattari's analysis seems to promote an unmalleable body subject to the whim of 'affects and local movements'.⁴⁵⁰ However, Deleuze is explicit in his text *Spinoza*:

⁴⁴⁷ Gilbert, p.89.

⁴⁴⁸ Latour, *How to Talk about the Body?*, p.206.

⁴⁴⁹ Further discussion of this spatial element in a Deleuzian context can be found in: Ian Davidson, *Ideas of Space in Contemporary Poetry* (New York and Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007): 'It is relatively straightforward to make connections between poetic form and Deleuze and Guattari's concept of BwO; ideas of open form and of flows and rhythms link easily to more experimental ideas of poetic form. The more difficult process is to demonstrate how the materiality of the body, the space it contains and the space it produces and is produced by, link to the form and content of poetry. A poem is not a body and a body is not a text, yet both exist in a relationship between their materialism (the text as material and the body as material); their conceptualization through process of representation; and their performance in specific times and places. It is in this complex of relationships that a focus on the body can support various readings of poetry.' (Davidson, p.57).

⁴⁵⁰ Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p.304.

Practical Philosophy that the movement and development of the body is defined through interaction with other bodies: 'a body affects other bodies, or is affected by other bodies; it is this capacity for affecting and being affected that also defines a body in its individuality'.⁴⁵¹ For critics such as Patricia Clough, Deleuzian analysis represented a new horizon: 'The turn to affect points[...] to a dynamism immanent to bodily matter and matter generally – matter's capacity for self-organization in being informational- which, I want to argue, may be the most provocative and enduring contribution of the affective turn.'⁴⁵² For Clough, the key to critical understanding of the body was to 'conceptualize affect as pre-individual bodily forces augmenting or diminishing a body's capacity to act'.⁴⁵³ However, leaning heavily upon the centralizing rationalization of the organism indebted to Deleuze and Guattari's work in the field, Clough's focus in particular falls to an analysis of how we might permit our bodies to be changed and developed with, alongside, or rather in the wake of, greater critical attention to affect and affect studies: 'I want to argue that focussing on affect – without following the circuit from affect to subjectively felt emotional states – makes clear how the turn to affect is a harbinger of and a discursive accompaniment to the forging of a new body'.⁴⁵⁴ Clough's analysis sets upon the distinction between the body as organism, and her own original classification: 'the biomediated body'.⁴⁵⁵ While the intercession of new medias and biomedias in the analysis of the body strays away from the approach I

⁴⁵¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. by Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988), p.123.

⁴⁵² Clough, p.207.

⁴⁵³ Clough, p.207.

⁴⁵⁴ Clough, p.207.

⁴⁵⁵ Clough, p.207.

wish to take towards reconfiguring understanding of the body, Clough's association with affect as a protagonist in the reconfiguration of the body provides a strong platform for my analysis of the figure and body of the performance poet:

'Therefore, while I am drawing on critical discourses on new media and biomedicine that define these media as technically expanding what the biological body can do while, however, remaining biological, I also am pointing to the postbiological threshold as the limit point of these discourses'.⁴⁵⁶ Through Clough's understanding of the body as a Deleuzian machine which is also subject to change and development, an approach towards positing the performance poet as a figure of affective pedagogy can be established, as can a practical approach to the mechanism of affective transmission.

Brennan and the mechanisms of affect transmission

Bound as affect is to the importance of the body (and by extension bodily mechanism and function) arguments presenting the pedagogical value of the performance poet in actively instructing or improving our bodily capacity to register and process affect engage predominantly with the actual process of affect transaction:

⁴⁵⁶ Clough, p.208.

in theory, the 'what' of affect often gives way to matters of 'how' in the rhythm or angle of approach: thus, why a great many theories of affect do not sweat the construction of any elaborate step-by-step methodology much at all, but rather come to fret the presentation or the style of presentation, the style of being present, more than anything else.⁴⁵⁷

Feminist and post-colonial critic Sara Ahmed approaches the mechanism of affect transmission in her article 'Happy Objects'. Looking specifically at happiness as affect, Ahmed poses the question of how we arrive at affective transactions within the context of objects.⁴⁵⁸ Positing the potential to invest affect in objects opens the critical field to analysis of how totems of affect are produced. It also enables an expansion of arguments concerning the validity of the totemizing elements of the spoken word poet, and of the shared performance poetry space. This in turn requires a dissection of the culture of a spoken word audience – the qualities which delineate the collective, and which can cause a radical shift in the affective senses of a collected group in response to performance. As Ahmed contends: 'Groups cohere around a shared orientation toward some things as being good, treating some things and not others as the cause of delight'⁴⁵⁹; collectives, communities,

⁴⁵⁷ Seigworth, p.14.

⁴⁵⁸ Ahmed describes the affective-transactional capacity of objects: 'We are moved by things. And in being moved, we make things. An object can be affective by virtue of its own location (the object might be here, which is where I experience this or that affect) and the timing of its appearance (the object might be now, which is when I experience this or that affect). To experience an object as being affective or sensational is to be directed not only toward an object, but to 'whatever' is around that object, which includes what is behind the object, the conditions of its arrival'. Sara Ahmed, 'Happy Objects', in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. by Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp.29-52 (p.33).

⁴⁵⁹ Ahmed, p.35.

and groups become sites for the development and transmission of concentrated affect. Affect critic Anna Gibbs compares the process of affect transmission from body to body within a group to a contagious outbreak:

Bodies can catch feelings as easily as catch fire: affect leaps from one body to another, evoking tenderness, inciting shame, igniting rage, exciting fear – in short, communicable affect can inflame nerves and muscles in a conflagration of every conceivable kind of passion.⁴⁶⁰

Though predicated by Gibbs as a simple biological process, the mechanism by which affect transmits through and shifts between bodies requires further examination. If ‘communicable affect’ can be patterned or analysed the results may demonstrate the capacity through which performance poetry achieves its affective results. To this end, within the field of affect transmission perhaps the most seminal research that has been conducted has been Teresa Brennan’s critical study, *The Transmission of Affect*, published in 2004.

Brennan’s research on affect and affect transmission explores a wide range of disciplines. In her introduction to *The Transmission of Affect* Brennan explains that she has sought to establish ‘the case for transmission by diverse means: deductive argument from clinical findings and biological facts, some history (theology and philosophy) of the affects, and a little modern neuroscience’.⁴⁶¹ Brennan’s intention

⁴⁶⁰ Anna Gibbs, ‘Contagious Feelings: Pauline Hanson and the Epidemiology of Affect’, in *Australian Humanities Review*, Volume 24, (2001), pp.1-9 (p.1).

⁴⁶¹ Brennan, p.8.

regarding the direction of the project as a whole is clearly elucidated in her opening statement:

Is there anyone who has not, at least once, walked into a room and 'felt the atmosphere'? But if many have paused to wonder how they received this impression, and why it seemed both objective and certain, there is no record of their curiosity in the copious literature on group and crowd psychology, or in the psychological and psychoanalytic writing that claims that one person can feel another's feelings... This is not especially surprising, as any inquiry into how one feels the others' affects, or the 'atmosphere', has to take account of physiology as well as the social, psychological factors that generated the atmosphere in the first place.⁴⁶²

The reason for Brennan's diverse range of critical approaches rests on the premise that the transmission of affect is a bodily process and well as a mental or psychological process:

The transmission of affect, whether it is grief, anxiety, or anger, is social or psychological in origin. But the transmission is also responsible for bodily changes; some are brief changes, as in the whiff of the room's atmosphere, some longer lasting. In other words, the transmission of

⁴⁶² Brennan, p.1.

affect, if only for an instant, alters the biochemistry and neurology of the subject. The 'atmosphere' of the environment literally gets into the individual.⁴⁶³

Once again, the predominance of the body in affect negotiation and transmission finds suitable purchase within the context of performance poetry. Reviews and testimonials from audience members who attend performance poetry events frequently cite the charged atmosphere and the feeling of excitement – hereto understood as the passage of affect to and from bodies. Indeed, the importance of such charged atmospheres cannot be overlooked as it often manifests as a fundamental influence upon the audience's response to a performance poetry event. Additionally, this passage of affect between audience and performer can be recognized in the ways that performers discuss their own performances. Ollie Higgins, a London based performance poet who was longlisted for the 2016 Out-Spoken poetry prize, notes of one of his performances:

I ended up making an animation to accompany my poem 'fuck you Theresa May'⁴⁶⁴ which was seen by some of the NUS student delegates who represented international students. They liked it so much they invited me to perform at a concert, which was absolutely mental. It was alive, because everyone there was totally in agreement with the message, so the whole room was basically jumping with energy, which

⁴⁶³ Brennan, p.1.

⁴⁶⁴ Ollie Higgins, 'fuck you Theresa May' <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zNZ2RW7H5a0>> [accessed 19 June 2016].

allowed me to feed off what they were feeling and heighten my performance. I think that was one of the best performances of my life. I felt like fuck all anxiety or worries about it, I was just going for it.⁴⁶⁵

Much like the experiences described by Azfa Awad Ali earlier in my thesis, Higgins also notes that the atmosphere of the performance space (the affects transmitted within it) can have an adverse impact on the performer and the performance:

Performance poetry is an interesting beast because I've found there's always a sort of curve to the night. At the beginning people tend to be a little less receptive, because the audiences come in cold, and need to warm up before being able to process listening to one speaker for 3 or 4 minutes at a time. Good comperes can usually alleviate this a bit but I've performed at a few nights with totally cold audiences which is always a struggle because they're much less receptive to emotion. You ask quite a lot of your audience as a poet; you are asking them to meet you, listen to you, and completely empathise with your point of view, all in a space of three minutes - it's hard for people to do that if they've just clocked off from a nine-hour shift from work. Once they get a few drinks in though, they tend to soften up and be very receptive.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶⁵ Ollie Higgins, interviewed by Jack McGowan, 01 June 2016.

⁴⁶⁶ Higgins, interviewed by Jack McGowan.

Higgins' frequent use of terminology which engages with bodily feeling or bodily action ('alive' or 'jumping' in the case of effective performances, and 'cold audiences' for less effective performances) reinforces the prominence of the body in the transmission of affect articulated by Brennan. Intent as Brennan was to respond to the question of affect from multiple platforms and disciplines, her analysis also deals with the problematizing issues surrounding such transmission. I submit that resistance towards the transmission of affect is delineated in Brennan's critical analysis in three forms: vagueness regarding the structure and definition of the 'crowd'; boundaries presented by sight-oriented conditions of objectivity; and fears of self-containment and threats to the subjective self.

Approaching the question of defining the group, criticism has traditionally been levied regarding the hard logic of a scientific approach to feelings of group identity: 'The idea that emotional connections between beings have an energetic force of their own, by dint of magnetism and romantic association, became less scientifically respectable'.⁴⁶⁷ In particular, study of transmission within crowds has been criticised for failing to establish or respond suitably to the issue of interaction between bodies:

In contemporary discussions of the group mind, now called the 'crowd' or 'gathering', transmission is discounted at the outset. By definition, it seems that the stress on the cognitive is a turn away from affect, and

⁴⁶⁷ Brennan, p.18.

so, necessarily, away from questions of affect's transmission. So invisible became the idea of transmission that it had to be rediscovered in the psychoanalytic clinic, dredged up from the unconscious.⁴⁶⁸

The question posed indicates the problematic status of the 'group mind', which Brennan clarifies in detail in her text. She begins with the simple premise that contentions regarding the 'group mind' are vulnerable to dissection on the basis of an unsubstantial and ungrounded assumption of reality: 'The group mind is invoked, much as pantheism might be invoked, with no argument but powerful 'intuitive' appeal'.⁴⁶⁹ The comparison to pantheism is an adept one, as it inculcates the question of engaging in a grouped identity; being, becoming, or feeling as one with an 'other'. However, Brennan's understanding of the question of 'group identity' is grounded on a logical approach to the definition: 'A group, in sociology and social psychology, is two or more people. The theory of the transmission of affect is always and already, given this definition, a theory of the group'.⁴⁷⁰ In Brennan's critique, mechanisms for transmission subsequently engage with the process of establishing the parameters and material of this relationship.⁴⁷¹

Brennan's description of the group rests on a review of the literature documenting crowd theory and her approach sublimates late nineteenth and twentieth-century

⁴⁶⁸ Brennan, p.18.

⁴⁶⁹ Brennan, p.17.

⁴⁷⁰ Brennan, p.51.

⁴⁷¹ Brennan states: 'If I emit one emotion and you emit another, we may both of us take on board the effects of this new composite. This should yield the basis for a contribution to group psychology, because we are beginning with an idea of how a gathering is constituted, in part, through the transmission of energetic affects (which may add up to something more than the individual affects of the group's members)' (Brennan, p.51).

influences on Freud's theories of feeling and affect in transmission⁴⁷²; particularly the work of Gustave Le Bon and William McDougall. The French theorist Gustave Le Bon first argued for a criticism distinguishing the individual as a generative site of affect rather than the crowd as a single body.⁴⁷³ However, though Le Bon's interest in the individual represents a shifted paradigm in affect studies his analysis failed to represent a scientific approach to the question of how crowd behaviour was influenced. Le Bon fell back on vogue theories of hypnosis as a justification for affective transmission, which among other specious conditions, failed to satisfactorily identify the hypnotist within the transaction. However, while raising problems, Le Bon's approach does implicate an intersection of performance poetry and affect transmission when one interrogates the notion of a source of affective contagion: 'The power of words is bound up with the images they evoke'.⁴⁷⁴ Brennan's analysis simply substitutes the notion of the hypnotist with the appellation of 'image' in Le Bon's argument: 'Le Bon does accord great power to the image as an organizer of crowd responses; and I suggest that the 'image', as Le Bon understood it, stands in often for the 'leader''.⁴⁷⁵ I would extend this analysis further, underlining the distinction Le Bon makes regarding the word. There is a direct correlation drawn between affective influence and words, which: 'synthesize

⁴⁷² See: Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology And The Analysis Of The Ego* (New York: Norton, 1975).

⁴⁷³ As Le Bon argues in his 1952 text *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*: 'The most striking peculiarity presented by a psychological crowd is the following: Whoever be the individuals that compose it, however like or unlike be their mode of life, their occupations, their character, or their intelligence, the fact that they have been transformed into a crowd puts them in possession of a sort of collective mind [âme collective] which makes them feel, think, and act in a manner quite different from that in which each individual of them would feel, think, and act were he in a state of isolation. There are certain ideas and feelings which do not come into being, or do not transform themselves into acts except in the case of individuals forming a crowd'. Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (London: Ernest Benn, 1952), p.27.

⁴⁷⁴ Le Bon, p.102.

⁴⁷⁵ Brennan, p.54.

the most diverse and unconscious aspirations and the hope of their realization'.⁴⁷⁶

The site of resistance to affect transmission delineated as critical doubt regarding a cohesive definition of crowd and group identity becomes a question of unpacking the correct empirical approach to how this identity is produced and nurtured.

Alongside the context of spoken word as a powerful generative force for collective experience I contend that Le Bon's study, though flawed, presents a platform for reinterpreting the nature of collective identity as a product of experiences with words and imagery; powerful forces endemic to our nature as collaborative and communicative beings.

The second site of resistance I identify in Brennan's study of critical approaches to affect and affect transmission is the notion of the empirical boundary as a condition of objective modes of study and understanding. Interest in affect transmission faces threats from shifts in the cultural conditions of representative empirical powers and faculties: 'Sight... is the sense that renders us discrete, while transmission breaches individual boundaries. The eighteenth century was so preoccupied with vision that it was known as the *siècle des lumières*'.⁴⁷⁷ The immunity of sight from the potential manipulations of affect transmission and the correlative difficulty of accepting affect's place as an explicator of social discourse is not clearly and categorically defined, however in practical terms Brennan argues that: 'by the nineteenth century sight was the first of the senses, and to this day the only sense, to attain objective status'.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁶ Le Bon, pp.102-103.

⁴⁷⁷ Brennan, p.17.

⁴⁷⁸ Brennan, p.17.

Sensory objectivity as a motif presents a problem for affect theorists, who must contend with the body as the battleground for their theoretical negotiations of affect and feeling. In this regard they risk engagement with a particularly intransigent binary between objectivity and subjectivity.⁴⁷⁹ Affect cannot establish firm ground in the face of expectations delineated by and for objective analysis because affect identifies within a realm of subjective feeling.⁴⁸⁰ For Brennan, this distinction crucially revolves around the non-engagement of sight as a measure of affect transmission:

Just as unconscious bodily processes are not meant to be intelligent or intentional processes, so are feeling and sensing ruled out as methodological tools for studying the object, because they cannot be seen, of course, and because they constitute a connection with the object.⁴⁸¹

⁴⁷⁹ Articulating this binary, Brennan suggests that: 'whether one insists on the subjective or the objective, whether one believes that the object can be known in itself or for itself, one tacitly assumes the foundational associations between mind, form, activity, will, and the subject, on the one hand, and, on the other, body, matter, passivity, lack of agency, and the object. When affects and feelings force themselves into consideration, they will be allocated a status that either makes them subjective or makes them part of the object, as in the physiology of the affects when bodily changes are measured – something to be studied, but not by means of feeling and sensing' (Brennan, p.19).

⁴⁸⁰ Elucidating this subjectivity, Brennan notes: 'The name or the concept of the transmission of affect does not sit well with an emphasis on individualism, on sight, and cognition. These things are all associated with the subject / object distinction, with thinking in terms of subject and object. This thinking, while it long precedes mechanism, gives rise to a particular understanding of objectivity that is coincident with it, based on the notion that the objective is in some way free of affect. Once this notion is accepted, then affect, as a vehicle connecting individuals to one another and the environment, and for that matter connecting the mind or cognition to bodily processes, ceases to be a proper object of study' (Brennan, pp.18-19).

⁴⁸¹ Brennan, p.19.

The dictum of the visual as the predominant and objective sensory mode presents a particular exegetical problem for the study of affect transmission in performance poetry. Although performance poetry relies upon sight as an important function in the process of transmitting affect; the performer's body as a site of affect production is a visual guide as much as an oral, aural or olfactory (hormonal) guide, however the correlative of accepting the vitality of sight is a diminishment of affect transmission as a complicated and multi-faceted process. The risk of this simplification is the exclusion of certain powerful modes of affect transmission as unsubstantiated.

Brennan's sites of resistance conflate in this respect. In part a critical response to the problems of Le Bon's late nineteenth century theories regarding the relationship between crowd and individual; William McDougall presented a case for what he termed the 'primitive sympathetic response' in *The Group Mind* (1920):

It is well recognized that almost any emotional excitement increases the suggestibility of the individual, though the explanation of the fact remains obscure. I have suggested that the explanation is to be found in the principle of the vicarious usage of nervous energy, the principle that nervous energy, liberated in any one part of the nervous system, may overflow the channels of the system in which it is liberated and reinforce processes initiated in other systems.⁴⁸²

⁴⁸² William McDougall, *The Group Mind: A Sketch of the Principles of Collective Psychology with Some Attempt to Apply Them to the Interpretation of National Life and Character* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1920), pp.59-60.

McDougall's contention that transmission was an energetic bodily process began the movement towards contemporary theories regarding the mechanism of affect transmission, however, as with Le Bon, McDougall was restricted by the trends and fashions of his time (explicitly the emphasis on the eye as the optimal tool for establishing and parsing empirical data). Criticism of McDougall was subsequently demarcated by the problematic value placed on the objectivity of sight.⁴⁸³ As a natural response to this site of resistance to affect, criticism of sight objectivity engages with the task of redressing the value placed on sight in relation to affect transmission. The actual concrete mechanism of affect transmission is designated by Brennan as 'entrainment'; a complicated bodily process engaging with multiple capacities by which the body receives affects: 'If contagion exists (and the study of crowds says it does) how is it effected? Images and mimesis explain some of it... but olfactory and auditory entrainment offer more comprehensive explanations'.⁴⁸⁴ One of Brennan's more colourful critical approaches is her insistence on the individual's capacity to 'smell' the atmosphere of a room:

If I walk back into the atmospheric room... and it is rank with the smell of anxiety, I breathe this in. Something is taken in that was not present, at the very least not consciously present, before. But no matter how thoroughly my system responds to the presence of this new affect, it is

⁴⁸³ Brennan discusses McDougall's limitations as such: 'McDougall is one who sees the 'primitive sympathetic response' in visual terms. The mechanism, in other words, is one of mimesis. Thus, the potential for an understanding of the direct transmission of affect is undercut by a stress on the sense of sight as the principle sense involved' (Brennan, p.56).

⁴⁸⁴ Brennan, p.68.

the case that something is added. Whether this in itself makes me afraid, or whether I respond to fear by producing it within myself after I have smelt it around me (and probably both things occur) the phenomenon cannot be explained by the simple postulate that I am acting out something I already felt or was driven toward feeling by my individual drives.⁴⁸⁵

Adopting a physiological approach to olfaction as a mechanism of entrainment, Brennan elicits evidence suggested by research into the relationship between pheromones and the transmission of affect from body to body. In response to the question of how affect can be transmitted within a space – the physiological response postulates that they are constantly present within our social environments:

One detects pheromones by touch or smell, but smell is more common. To smell pheromones is also in a sense to consume them. But the point here is that no direct physical contact is necessary for a transmission to take place. Pheromones are literally in the air.⁴⁸⁶

Although pheromones have stronger conventional associations with sexuality and reproduction (owing in large part to their popularity as a medium for understanding and clarifying relationships between animals) the role of pheromones in

⁴⁸⁵ Brennan, p.68.

⁴⁸⁶ Brennan, p.69.

understanding wider social relationships between humans can be expanded to include the transmission of affect. Dutch psychologist Piet Vroon proposes a context whereby this expansion may be structuralized. In his research Vroon argues that pheromones:

also have a communicative function... a distinction is made between pheromones that affect the endocrine system (which produces sex hormones), pheromones that facilitate physiological changes of various kinds (primer pheromones) and pheromones that directly provoke a certain behaviour in the observer (releaser pheromones).⁴⁸⁷

Of relevance to the transmission of affect and its application in the context of performance poetry is the notion that pheromones may both provoke and facilitate emotional or behavioural changes. This requires intervention within the body of the individual receiving the pheromones. The relationship between incoming pheromones and actualized physical changes to the body is dictated by the interplay between pheromones (external) and hormones (internal). Hormonal manipulation as a result of the intercession of an external pheromone can radically change, challenge, or disrupt emotions. However, such a conclusion does not indicate the need to radically resituate olfaction within the context of entrainment and affect transition. In Brennan's critique she is careful to ensure that this does not simply imply a new hegemony (smell for sight): 'hormones are not only

⁴⁸⁷ Piet Vroon, *Smell, The Secret Seducer* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1997), p.126.

produced by smell, nor is olfaction the only means for the transmission of affect'.⁴⁸⁸

With regards to the importance of olfaction within a general structure of affect transmission and entrainment one can begin to see the waning of the eye and of sight, Brennan is instead positing a wider model of understanding for affect entrainment. Elevation of the nose as a totem for fostering strong affective relationships with the world is misconceived. In the context of Brennan I recall the renegotiation of the body proposed by Deleuze and Guattari. This poses the nose as a smelling machine which contributes to a depiction of the body at large as a mechanism, the engagement of multiple parts.⁴⁸⁹ Within this model the presence of a dominant mechanism for receiving affect is disturbed in favour of a model acknowledging the relativity of multiple mechanisms working in relationship with one another to provide a more sophisticated platform for affect transmission and receipt; the body as a whole.

Conceiving the limitations of establishing a singular mode of objective transmission enables an analysis of Brennan's third site of resistance; self-

⁴⁸⁸ Brennan, p.69.

⁴⁸⁹ Of great interest, though too extensive for the purposes of this thesis, is the work of Rowan Boyson. Her focus on the senses, particularly smell, and particularly Romantic and Victorian poetics during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, elucidates a clear argument for a defence of sensory pleasure as an indicator of an Enlightenment aesthetic. Although I establish a mechanism of affect transmission which incorporates the whole body it is noteworthy that research seeking to re-examine the translation of sensory receipt into poetics is being undertaken. See particularly: Rowan Boyson, *Wordsworth and the Enlightenment Idea of Pleasure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Rowan Boyson, 'The Senses in Eighteenth-Century Literature', in *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. by Anne C. Villa (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp.155-179, and her lecture 'The olfactory imagination: smell, materialism and metaphor in the eighteenth century' delivered at the Queen Mary Centre for Eighteenth Century Studies on the 11th of November 2015.

containment and threat to the subjective self. Proceeding from McDougall's early twentieth century critical material, Brennan poses the following:

The emphasis on sight as the principal mechanism in the communication of affect goes unchallenged in the literature on groups thereafter. There is also a stress on hearing, but, as with the emphasis on sight, the idea is that the communication of affect takes place between individuals whose affects are self-contained: one individual has the affect, other individuals see it, or sometimes hear it, they then drum it up within themselves, and so the affect, apparently, spreads. The emphasis on sight as the preeminent sense rendering individuals discreet to one another has been extensively criticised in writings on modernity. But the emphasis is not really challenged, or not consistently challenged, unless one takes account of the role of the less valorised senses.⁴⁹⁰

Fixation on sight as our predominant sense does not simply extend to its objective status as a useful tool to provide empirical validation of shared experience, sight is a formative aspect of our concept of the body as self-contained.⁴⁹¹ This issue of self-containment and subjectivity is vital to the

⁴⁹⁰ Brennan, pp.56-57.

⁴⁹¹ Brennan discusses the link between sight and self-containment in great detail as it is key to her understanding of how beings form an understanding of their own individuality: 'If we inquire into how the idea that we are self-contained came about, then ontologically as well as phylogenetically, we find that vision is critical. At the individual level, it is the priority given to hallucination in the formation of the individual that is significant. In infancy, hallucination and fantasy are key tools for inventing a world that is other than the dependent world of reality. In adult life, such fantasies are aided by visual media' (Brennan, p.171).

administration of affect in studies of performance poetry, as it is a medium which relies on the full extent of affective drives and influences to facilitate a radical change in the emotions of its audience. Without the capacity to yield this change, a capacity engendered by the unique circumstances of performance poetry as a public mode engaged with a spectrum of bodily functions, performance poetry might be rendered indistinct from page poetry with regards to its affective potential. To elaborate; the more linear horizons of the text (the lesser affective interaction) would cease to hold relevance in the face of affective self-containment or the non-negotiation of affect entering and affecting the body, a notion which is not without purchase in contemporary society:

As the notion of the individual gained in strength, it was assumed more and more that emotions and energies are naturally contained, going no farther than the skin. But while it is recognized freely that individualism is a historical and cultural product, the idea that affective self-containment is also a production is resisted... if we accept with comparatively ready acquiescence that our thoughts are not entirely independent, we are, nonetheless, peculiarly resistant to the idea that our emotions are not altogether our own.⁴⁹²

For Brennan arguments regarding societal resistance to affective governance of emotions are located by an acknowledgment of dominant Neo-Darwinian discourse

⁴⁹² Brennan, p.2.

in contemporary society: 'My affect, if it comes across you, alters your anatomical makeup for good or ill. This idea, perhaps more than any other, stands Neo-Darwinism on its head. It is directly at odds with the premise on which Neo-Darwinian biology is based'.⁴⁹³ This is a hegemony which Brennan suggests must be destabilized before an acceptance of affect transmission gains traction within contemporary critical analysis of emotion:

Rather than the generational line of inheritance (the vertical line of history), the transmission of affect, conceptually, presupposes a horizontal line of transmission: the line of the heart. The affects are not inherited, or not only inherited. They also flow from this one to that one, here and now, via olfaction and the circulation of the blood. The relatively new discipline of psychoneuroendocrinology shows us this much... recent research in this field has demonstrated an immediate effect of airborne chemicals on human mood, although its significance goes unsung and attempts at disproving it (if any) remain unpublished. These facts may be neglected for a time as they signal the end of the hegemony of Neo-Darwinism, which is anchored in assumptions of self-containment.⁴⁹⁴

Inculcated within a discussion of affect transmission and a re-negotiation of the self-contained individual in a post-Darwinian context is the notion that the

⁴⁹³ Brennan, p.74.

⁴⁹⁴ Brennan, p.75.

relationship between the horizontal and vertical must be explored. There may be credence in discussing, with an eye to yielding an interplay between our affect driven behaviour and our capacity as individuals to retain control of our affective drives by virtue of the line of history, our predisposition to behave in certain manners. This may be a disposition fashioned by lineage in a Neo-Darwinian sense, or else educated by conscious reflection on behaviour. This, however, is an analysis which extends beyond the necessary elaboration of Brennan's three sites of resistance.

The threat to individual subjectivity posed by a depiction of affect as not only an intrusive force, but an intrusive force which retains a capacity to govern our emotional states can easily be overindulged by detractors of the affective model. Out of this perspective there is a clear correlation between a fear of affect's potentially subversive capabilities and a mistrust and scepticism of the latent didacticism inherent in certain critical readings of performance poetry. As I have argued, this particular criticism of the persuasiveness of spoken word is engendered by a resistance to being emotionally manipulated; being told what to feel defeats the purpose of the poem. The intrigue at the centre of the page poem is a slow elaboration of potential feeling rather than a swift, explicit, and declarative indication of the poem's required response. The tacit implication of a loss of agency over one's emotions bound within the premise of affect studies plays into the hands of critics who target the didacticism of spoken word. However, these two aspects of the mechanism of performance poetry can be read differently if one accepts that affect transmission is an inherently and inalienably social process:

I am using the term 'transmission of affect' to capture a process that is social in origin but biological and physical in effect. The origin of transmitted affects is social in that these affects do not only arise within a particular person but also come from without. They come via an interaction with other people and an environment.⁴⁹⁵

As tempting as it may be to engage in the business of measuring out the vertiginous heights of their ivory towers, such sceptics of performance poetry can be forgiven for their reluctance to accede to, or participate in the social model. Embracing our reality as social beings would be a fine and fearless display of unlicensed trust when one considers that for the better part of our time as humans cohabiting within a social structure we have engaged almost exclusively in an environment geared towards concretizing subjective control over our own emotions. Indeed, the subjective still has a place within the equation despite motions towards its displacement:

All this means, indeed the transmission of affect means, that we are not self-contained in terms of our energies. There is no secure distinction between the 'individual' and the 'environment'. But transmission does not mean that a person's particular emotional experience is irrelevant.

⁴⁹⁵ Brennan, p.3.

We may influence the registration of the transmitted affect in a variety of ways; affects are not received or registered in a vacuum.⁴⁹⁶

Affect transmission provokes a discussion of the permeability of boundaries and the extent to which we have control over affects that impact upon our emotional dispositions. However, the corresponding relevance of this affect is still, of course, unique to the individual:

even if I am picking up on your affect, the linguistic and visual content, meaning the thoughts I attach to that affect, remain my own: they remain the product of the particular historical conjunction of words and experiences I represent. The thoughts are not necessarily tied to the affects they appear to evoke. One may as well say that the affects evoke the thoughts.⁴⁹⁷

Despite the contention that hormonal influence upon human agency radically: 'challenges the Neo-Darwinian paradigm'⁴⁹⁸ and the associated levelling agenda of correlative arguments repositioning the objectivity of the self, one must still acknowledge that individuation necessarily precedes discussion and analysis of affect transmission by virtue of the localization of the individual as the site of analysis. Presenting affect transmission as a mechanism relies on the notion of placing the individual at the centre of discussion and thus the individual is

⁴⁹⁶ Brennan, p.6.

⁴⁹⁷ Brennan, p.7.

⁴⁹⁸ Brennan, p.77.

empowered. At some point in a discussion of affect, one must pay attention to the individual, to their body – even if it is to subsequently deny the non-permeability of the self. With comparative reference to Richard Dawkins’ analysis in *The Selfish Gene*⁴⁹⁹ Brennan argues that the structure of thinking about identity and self-containment which we rely upon conditions our understanding of how affect transmits between individuals:

Richard Dawkins, for instance, insists that we are lived by forces beyond our conscious control. But at least they are our unconscious forces, perceived as such because perception has also been structured in such a way as to mean we do not see or conceive of an alternative way of understanding, let alone one that means we are not (necessarily) masters of the house.⁵⁰⁰

What this means for a discussion of affect and affect transmission is that boundaries between the self and the other, the relationship between intersecting bodies (through pheromone-hormone entrainment) will always be delineated by the self regardless of whether the biological implications of such radicalisation of the individual are rendered questionable. Brennan’s response to this re-situation is framed in her understanding of the individual’s capacity to resist affective entrainment: ‘visiting intentions are eluded by memory, ethics, and honesty’.⁵⁰¹ Such a particularly poetic triptych of better angels presented by Brennan receives

⁴⁹⁹ Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

⁵⁰⁰ Brennan, p.77.

⁵⁰¹ Brennan, p.76.

further elaboration in her response to the question of self-containment. Brennan discusses ideas not of an individual selfhood with a hard-coded imperviousness to affect but a self-containment negotiated by one's ability to relegate affects which disrupt senses of self-containment:

The self-contained subject maintains itself by projecting out the affects that otherwise interfere with its agency (anxiety and any sense of inferiority) in a series of affective judgements that are then carried by the other. As these affective judgements are tied to the very structuration of the ego via its relation with the other, they are likely to reinforce themselves in the process of creating passification.⁵⁰²

Affective entrainment, through olfaction or otherwise, can be prevented from disrupting the body by the rigour of the ego. Brennan's contention that affective negativity is ascribed explicitly to the other is a clear indicator of the ego's prevalence in her model of affect transmission, and directs her reader towards the value of the body; the individual that is open to affect:

The act of directing negative affects to the other severs my kin tie with her by objectifying her. I make her into an object by directing these affects towards her, because that act marks her with affects that I reject in myself... By encouraging attitudes of suspicion, by (worse)

⁵⁰² Brennan, p.113.

encouraging the idea that a privileged class, sex, race, or caste is free of dissembling, emotionality, or stupidity, one comes to overvalue one's own capacities.⁵⁰³

In this respect, as argued in Seigworth and Gregg's 'An Inventory of Shimmers' – the education of the senses through affective experience is crucial to understanding the critical and social contexts of the individual. Moreover, the capacity affect has to challenge the self-contained ego is determined by its pervasion: 'all the miniscule or molecular events of the unnoticed'.⁵⁰⁴ Against the weight of information affect provides the body, the ego must constantly struggle to retain self-containment:

The conscious ego forecloses knowledge and assumptions that challenge its sense of intellectual superiority in its body; the unconscious ego censors similar knowledge by repressing it and keeping it unconscious. By this censorship and this foreclosure, the ego creates gaps in conscious understanding. These gaps mean that ego-consciousness knows less than the senses whose multiple communications battle with the ego's censorship and denial.⁵⁰⁵

Against the pervasion of affect transmission and entrainment, the individual is forced to accede to the fact that their own body is not a contained article, but a structure constantly present to and within a social world:

⁵⁰³ Brennan, p.119.

⁵⁰⁴ Seigworth, p.2.

⁵⁰⁵ Brennan, p.138.

Affects (via hormones and other means of projection and reception) are carried in the blood, and with them is carried the presence of the other and the social in the system. (To find an utterly pure soul within, something untouched by human error, one would have to sustain living attention through a process of complete exsanguination.)⁵⁰⁶

Tracing the pedagogic capacities of affect through Brennan's discussion of mechanisms of transmission allows one to arrive at the conclusion which I gesture towards earlier in this chapter. The three sites of resistance posited by Brennan; vagueness regarding the structure and definition of the 'crowd', boundaries presented by sight-oriented conditions of objectivity, and fears of self-containment and threats to the subjective self- are all elements of the same locating structure behind criticism of affect's capacity to genuinely alter the body of the recipient. In the case of performance poetry (when compared to page poetry) the potential of the medium is relegated or diminished by the suspicion of the performer's capacity to evoke genuine feeling, compounded by a sense that the feeling in question is not sufficiently or appropriately profound, judicious, and honest. Such doubts deny the potential of affect transmission to engage with the ego on both a conscious and a subconscious level – to educate the senses. A subtext repositioning the critical fascination of Le Bon and McDougall may be the fact that crowd mentality contemporarily occupies the position of a watchword for political and social

⁵⁰⁶ Brennan, p.139.

cynicism. Such an impression destabilizes the potency of affect transmission by locating sites of overt, palpable (smell-able) transmission and rendering them at best disingenuous, and certainly not without an agenda. In addition, the dictum of 'seeing is believing' inculcated in the hegemony of sight directing our empirical relationship with the world, diminishes the perceptual potency of our relationships within a social space. Brennan's concentration on olfaction and the importance of pheromones and hormones within the dynamic of affect transmission replaces the contained location of sight-based relationships with world stimuli as the prominent critical element of the affective process, reorienting the dynamic of individual engagement towards a structure of social engagement. As discussed, there is a distinct correlation between the renegotiation of sight and the disruption of ideas of self-containment. Sight is an empirical faculty which reinforces ideas of self-containment by refusing to provide a space for actual physiological or bodily engagement between individuals.⁵⁰⁷ However this particular idea of self-containment is frustrated by studies of hormonal responses in the context of certain affective environments. The stage (a site of performance poetry) articulates a space where affect transmission can be engaged with on a conscious level, where one can feel tangible affective transmission.

⁵⁰⁷ It should be noted that arguments which submit to a diachronic visual/oral binary can be questioned. As the critic Jonathan Miller notes in his study of the work of Marshall McLuhan: 'if, as McLuhan suggests, the visual sense was subordinate to the acoustic one before the invention of typography, the eloquent orator Cicero would surely have been the last person to sponsor the use of strong visual images as an aide memoire. And yet, in spite of the fact that Cicero lived long before the invention of type, he took extraordinary pains to acknowledge the primacy of sight among all other senses' (p.54, Miller). While important to note, I suspect that this rhetoric is clouded somewhat by a particular and problematic aspect of McLuhan's negotiation with media which abnegates materiality. Jonathan Miller, *McLuhan* (London: Fontana/Collins, 1971).

For the pedagogical, educational value of affect transmission it is important that Brennan's contention regarding the individual's capacity to cultivate their own sense of self-containment is recognized as an important element. To reiterate, this self-containment does not extend to a hardening of the skin or a thickening of the blood – an ability to manifestly refuse the physical stimulus of certain affects – but to reject the implications of the physiological changes provoked by affective transmissions. Much as attention must be paid to the individual, the body placed at the centre of affect driven analysis, the role of the ego and the self must be acknowledged and accommodated in order to derive the value of the potential education available through the recognition of our affective capacities:

From the burden of individual self-absorption comes the interest in directing attention around and through the very structures that produce that self-absorption in the first place, releasing affects via the conscious exploration of their sedimentation. Extending attention into the flesh is simultaneously an exploration of the affects that have captured both individual souls as well as crowds of souls, and in this exploration there is an acknowledgment and a coming to terms with what the ages of reason and individualism have excluded from consciousness. This is the connection, affectively and energetically, to other living and dead things, the connection to the living logos and to the thing that misdirects affects and energies toward destruction.⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁸ Brennan, pp.160-161.

Sites of resistance to Brennan's notion of affect transmission are thus important arbitrating elements in the education of our affective drives. Engaging with the patho-logy of affect, conceptualizing the body as a space to interpret affective neutrality and generate intensities of feeling requires not only a receptive mind but an inquisitive mind, contesting the tenability of a self that accepts without scruple all affect driven towards the heart. Once again, the didacticism of the performance poet may be evoked as a criticism, however as Brennan elucidates, the mechanism of affect transmission and reception is more complicated than this model would indicate. Self-absorption rendered both consciously and unconsciously by the ego requires the audience member to question the visitation of affect enacted upon the body. Criticism of performance poetry as emotionally unsophisticated does not engage with the issues of affect that manifest beneath the surface of the skin and within the body. Affective, experiential education is facilitated by poetry performances, which offer a distillation of wide degrees of affect- allowing the body to interact with various drives. To return to 'An Inventory of Shimmers', performance poetry enables a space where: 'the pathology of a body meets the pedagogy of an affective world'.⁵⁰⁹

Phenomenological enquiries

⁵⁰⁹ Seigworth, p.12.

The progress of such education, and the difficulties associated with perceiving the potential of affect can be distinguished both in the academic aggression articulated in my first chapter and in the sophisticated position that affect occupies as articulated in my second chapter. With the introduction of the potential for a pedagogy of affect the enmeshed interrelations of affect and the complications that occur when one attempts to track it⁵¹⁰ could present a dividing non-linearity without suitable conditions through which analysis may be focused. I contend in my next chapter that these conditions are grounded by performance poetry's engagement with space. However, in order to robustly connect the affective turn with the spatial turn it is necessary to first arbitrate an investigation of their respective experiential capacities through an initial phenomenological enquiry.⁵¹¹ Phenomenology underpins much of the thinking outlined by many of the scholars I have already discussed and will go on to discuss. I consider it necessary to accompany my analysis of the essential structures of affect transmission with a phenomenological reification of affects. I also consider it necessary to foreground a discussion of the occupation of space through performance with a phenomenological analysis of judgements of space.

⁵¹⁰ Andrew Sturdy, "Knowing the Unknowable? A Discussion of Methodological and Theoretical Issues in Emotion Research and Organizational Studies", in *Organization*, Volume 10. Issue 1 (2003), pp.81–105.

⁵¹¹ The relationships between space, phenomenology, and poetics has been explored in a number of critical frameworks, notably Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969) originally published in French in 1958. Bachelard primarily focuses on the poetic-aesthetic experience of dwelling in space, inviting a discussion of architectures which foreground these phenomenological experiences and in this respect enables a connection between experience and encounter with space, a consideration I articulate in the course of my analysis of performance spaces.

Critical appraisal of the negotiation between affect and phenomenology begins with the same logic that defines the value of reading affect through performance poetry: that beneath the surface of receipt the spectator is involved in a highly complicated process of affective comprehension. As Paul Libbey Russell argues in his article 'The Phenomenology of Affect':

Any feeling, no matter how basic, is already a highly complicated event and its own piece of competence, including within it elements of intentionality, of memory, of cognition, of communication, of attachment, and a thrust towards development, towards competence, towards a coherent sense of reality. We can say, then, that our feelings colour the world and confer reality. That is, we discover reality in our feelings, far more than we do from the traditional sense data.⁵¹²

Russell's arguments are coordinated by what he contends are the functions of affects. Affects act as signals to ourselves and (through the mechanisms of transmission I have already investigated) signals to others: 'all affects serve as signals, as indicators of reality. Affects also serve a communicative function. They serve as signals not only to us, but also from us to other people'.⁵¹³ These functions of communication and transmission are, as Brennan contended, governed by the body. However, though I have offered the body as an apposite tool to process Barthes' Neutrality or Seigworth's 'inventory of shimmers', this does not defuse the

⁵¹² Paul Libbey Russell. 'The Phenomenology of Affect', in *Smith College Studies in Social Work*, Vol. 76. Issue 1-2 (2006), pp.67-70 (p.68).

⁵¹³ Russell, 'The Phenomenology of Affect', p.70.

problematic issue of attempting (predicating a pedagogical utility) to present an objective or essential structure of the experience of the performance poem. In his essay 'Embodied Inter-Affection in and beyond Organizational Life-Worlds' Professor of Leadership and Organization studies⁵¹⁴ Wendelin Küpers argues that:

affective experiences are never related to finished closed "objects", but always in poly-sensual, inter-relational and continuous processes. As dynamic phenomena, they are unforeseeable in their self-disclosing and "othering" expressions throughout their ongoing unfolding.⁵¹⁵

The implication of this perspective situates transient affect in a difficult relationship with conceptual definition, empirical investigation, and the comprehension of a logocentric model by which one might close-off the interstitial, dynamic elements of affect for any meaningful pedagogical analysis. However, Küpers presents phenomenology as a potential solution: 'a phenomenological approach contributes to exploring the interwoven nexus of affection in a more inclusive way, while keeping the heterogeneity and multi-foldedness of its phenomenality alive'.⁵¹⁶ Küpers appeals to the notion of affective encounter as a process by which the individual makes phenomenological sense of an experience through a process of feeling in relation to the self and to others. By doing so he presents a strategy

⁵¹⁴ Much of Küpers' work, particularly his cross-disciplinary phenomenological criticism, centres on an investigation into the impact of economization of affect and emotion in economic and organizational life-worlds. Although this focus separates him from the specific experience of a performance poem his work provides an interesting context for framing the relationship between the affective body and the phenomenological experience.

⁵¹⁵ Wendelin Küpers, 'Embodied Inter-Affection in and beyond Organizational Life-Worlds', in *Critical Horizons*, Vol. 15. Issue 2 (2014), pp.150-178 (p.154).

⁵¹⁶ Küpers, p.151.

whereby one might avoid reducing the variability of affect to a quantified array of embodied experience, thus re-evaluating the problematic idea of affect pedagogy as an attempt to objectively schematize or pronounce upon lived experience. The value phenomenological enquiry places upon the person through lived experience and upon rigorous yet unconstricting discovery-oriented study of practices⁵¹⁷ offers a way for pedagogies of affect to avoid the complications of pedagogical framing.

My analysis of a phenomenological interpretation of performance poetry is developed from the theories of the French scholar and phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty. A more comprehensive analysis of the Merleau-Pontian framework of body and perception would anticipate a deeper study of the French phenomenological tradition post-Husserl.⁵¹⁸ However I have elected to limit my focus to Merleau-Ponty because of the fertile and motivating relationship between Merleau-Pontian concepts of the body and of the body in space. My acknowledgment of the utility of Merleau-Pontian phenomenology stems from three understandings. Firstly, Merleau-Ponty placed particular emphasis on the value of modern art and modern literature to effectively express the relationship between humanity and being which underpinned the logic of representation he examined. More so than philosophy, Merleau-Ponty believed that the current

⁵¹⁷ As described in: Mark P. Orbe, 'Phenomenology', in *Encyclopaedia of communication theory*, ed. by Stephen W. Littlejohn and Karen A. Foss (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. 2009), pp. 750-752.

⁵¹⁸ Husserl's influence on Merleau-Ponty is discussed in Dermot Moran's essay 'Husserl and Merleau-Ponty on Embodied Experience' where Moran refers to Merleau-Ponty as 'a supremely subtle and perceptive reader of Husserl... quick to grasp the fuller implications of Husserl's works, which we, thanks to the Husserliana publications, can now appreciate in more detail.' (p.176, Moran) Moran, Dermot, 'Husserl and Merleau-Ponty on Embodied Experience', in *Advancing Phenomenology: Essays in Honor of Lester Embree*, ed. by Thomas Nenon and Philip Blosser (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010), pp.175-197.

epoch relied upon art to prevent superimpositions upon the subject, and to allow phenomenology to comply with sensible, lived experience.⁵¹⁹ Secondly, in relation to an affective understanding of performance poetry Merleau-Ponty is particularly well placed to extend my argument into a phenomenological reading. As David Morris notes in his chapter in *Merleau-Ponty: Key Concepts* (2008) exploring Merleau-Ponty's concept of the body:

The body is at the heart of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy... There is no ontological separation between the experiencing 'I' and the body as one lives it. Indeed, the lived body is one's intentional opening to the world, through which alone one experiences meaningful things in the first place. Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the body is therefore no mere study of a neutral object, but an investigation of one's existence as a philosopher.⁵²⁰

Foregrounding the fundamentality of the body in the phenomenological experience supports my investigation into the role of the body in the exchange of affect through performance. Thirdly, deeply ingrained in Merleau-Pontian concepts of the body is an understanding that experience is constructed by a complicit dynamic of body and of space: 'being is synonymous with being situated'.⁵²¹ This has vital

⁵¹⁹ For further analysis, see: Mauro Carbone, 'The truth of ideas and idea of philosophy in the later Merleau-Ponty', in *Merleau-Ponty and the Possibilities of Philosophy: Transforming the Tradition*, ed. by Bernard Flynn, Wayne J. Froman, and Robert Vallier (New York: SUNY Press, 2009), pp.237-257.

⁵²⁰ David Morris, 'Inventions: Body', *Merleau-Ponty: Key Concepts*, ed. by Rosalyn Diprose and Jack Reynolds (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008), pp.111-121 (p.111).

⁵²¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), p.252.

implications for my third chapter which analyses the role space plays in the experience of performance poetry. This essential correlation of body and space, affirmed in Stephen Priest's critique of Merleau-Ponty⁵²² allows for a more elegant segue between these two compositional factors of a poem's performance.

The value of a phenomenological, Merleau-Pontian approach to understanding performance poetics lies in the character of Merleau-Ponty's thought regarding the process of perception. He proposes that perception is not simply contingent upon the body, but is itself a bodily phenomenon. Discussing the spatiality of the body Merleau-Ponty conveys the notion of extending our bodies as experiential sites by comparison to a white stick: 'The blind man's stick has ceased to be an object for him, and is no longer perceived for itself; its point has become an area of sensitivity, extending the scope and active radius of touch, and providing a parallel to sight'.⁵²³ The argument offered is that the habitualization of objects 'incorporates them into the bulk of our own body'.⁵²⁴ The importance of this to an analysis of the process of perception is that it opens up the potential for a concept of the body as a malleable site of experience: 'the normal subject has his body not only as system of present positions, but besides, and thereby, as an open system of an infinite number of equivalent positions directed to other ends'.⁵²⁵ With this more flexible model⁵²⁶ in hand one could reposition the very idea of perception, like

⁵²² Stephen Priest, *Merleau-Ponty: The Arguments of the Philosophers*, ed. by Ted Honderich (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p.113-114.

⁵²³ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.143.

⁵²⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.143.

⁵²⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.141.

⁵²⁶ This is a flexibility predicated by the sense that the world, and our experiences of it, have infinite capacity. This is further analysed in the introduction to *Performance and Phenomenology Traditions and Transformations*, where the Merleau-Pontian approach specifically: 'embraces the possibility

affective reception, to be a shifting, mutable process. However, unlike affect which, as I have argued, can be demonstrably understood as a feeling in relation and in response to other bodies, Merleau-Ponty's description of the act of perception does not fully endorse notions of the self's perception as being an ultimately unanchored, bodily experience. Alongside the body's perception, one also encounters the deliberateness of the conscious self. This interrogation of the discreteness of perception is expressed in Taylor Carman's analysis of Merleau-Ponty:

Perception is not a private mental event, nor is the body just one more material object set alongside others. We lose sight of perception itself when we place it on either side of a sharp distinction between inner subjective experiences and external objective facts. In its most concrete form, perception manifests itself instead as an aspect of our bodily being in the world.⁵²⁷

Carman's description of Merleau-Pontian perception allows for the intentional: 'Perception... is the ground of both the subjectivity and the objectivity of experience, of its inner feel and its intentional grip on the world'⁵²⁸ and in doing so it also allows for the engineering of conditions which situate perception as both a

that experience cannot be solved—it is inexhaustible, incomplete, and mysterious. And yet we can still encounter it—cannot help but be involved with it—and find meaning in it.' Maaïke Bleeker, Jon Foley Sherman, and Eirini Nedelkopoulou, 'Introduction', in *Performance and Phenomenology Traditions and Transformations* (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp.1-20 (p.3).

⁵²⁷ Taylor Carman, *Merleau-Ponty: Routledge Philosophers* (London: Routledge, 2008), p.78.

⁵²⁸ Carman, p.80.

bodily experience, and an abstractly generated process.⁵²⁹ Carman presents the idea that subjective sensation - a comparison or a questioning of the quality of sensory experience is an aspect of perception which, separate from the bodily experience, allows the subject's interrogation to inform their perception. The complexity of this argument in the context of its application to performance poetics seems to question the strong affective potential of the experience of the performance poem. However, Carman reads Merleau-Pontian perception as a balance between the bodily and the intentional where the mechanism is firmly located within the body (and therefore the site of affect generation): 'perception is not a mental phenomenon, if by 'mental' we mean something in contrast to material or physical. Rather, perception is a bodily phenomenon, which is to say that we experience our own sensory states not as mere states of mind, but as states of our bodies'.⁵³⁰ Additionally, although Merleau-Ponty used *Phenomenology of Perception* to question the relationship between perception and affective reception, interrogating the nature of the body as an affective object: 'It was therefore recognized that my body does not present itself as the objects of external impressions do'.⁵³¹ In his later developments he was explicit in expressing that the

⁵²⁹ As Carman argues: 'Interior and exterior, mental and physical, subjective and objective—such notions are simply too crude and misleading to capture it. For perception is both intentional and bodily, both sensory and motor, and so neither merely subjective nor objective, inner nor outer, spiritual nor mechanical. Moreover, the middle ground between such traditional categories is not just their middle but indeed their ground, for it is what they depend on and presuppose. There are such things as subjective sensations and sensory qualities, of course, but only because we can sometimes generate them by abstracting away from our original openness onto the world and zeroing in on isolated features of things, and on bits of experience, which we suppose (rightly or wrongly) must correspond to those features, just as we can abstract in the other direction away from ourselves toward a world independent of perspective on it' (Carman, p.78).

⁵³⁰ Carman, p.80.

⁵³¹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.93.

ontological relationship between the individual (body) and the world was one of intimate shared bodily experience.⁵³²

Understanding the centrality of the body in the phenomenological experience, I now turn to the implications this portends for the situation of the body in space. As I will argue, alongside the negotiation of affect, performance additionally requires an underlying recognition of space. This is present at the initiation of any performance, where the performer clears (mentally and frequently physically) a space in which to enact the performance. In spoken word the poet will establish themselves as the focal point within a room, thus securing the space for performance. My contention is that this element of performance provides a crucial social function by utilizing the performance space to interrogate the space of the everyday. This not only correlates with, but facilitates the role I have outlined for performance poetry as a pedagogical examination of our affective capacities. Additionally, this process has a firm basis in our phenomenological perception of the body in space. As Merleau-Ponty outlines in *Phenomenology of Perception*: 'my whole body for me is not an assemblage of organs juxtaposed in space. I am in undivided possession of it and I know where each of my limbs is through a bodily

⁵³² As Carman asserts: 'by the late 1950s [Merleau-Ponty] was apparently dissatisfied with what he had come to regard as the still too dualistic framework of *Phenomenology of Perception*. In its place he now insisted more emphatically that body and world must be seen as overlapping sinews in a common 'flesh' (chair), related not as situation and reaction (let alone stimulus and response), but as a kind of 'chiasm,' an 'interweaving' or 'interlacing' (entrelacs) of threads in a single fabric. Merleau-Ponty scholars often write as if these new metaphors amount to a radical break with his earlier work, but I think this is only half right. For although Merleau-Ponty's concept of flesh does mark an abandonment of the primacy of consciousness in his account of being in the world, the images of chiasm and interlacing are elaborations on an idea he had already been expounding in his early work, decades before' (Carman, pp.79-80).

image in which all are included'.⁵³³ The relevance of this outline of the body is that it offers up the possibility to understand the body in relation to the space it occupies. Although the body is discreet: 'The outline of my body is a frontier which ordinary spatial relations do not cross'⁵³⁴, it is also explicitly and intimately shaped and manifested by the spatial life-world: 'We are therefore feeling our way towards a second definition of the body image: it is no longer seen as the straightforward result of associations established during experience, but a total awareness of my posture in the intersensory world'.⁵³⁵ From a phenomenological perspective spatial occupation, for example the spatial positioning of a performer at a poetry performance, is not crudely restricted to the literal notion of a stage, but can be understood as a situational space generated by the role the performer plays within the shared experience of the event.⁵³⁶

The implications of this phenomenological and experiential perspective of space allows for my subsequent analysis of space in performance to be shaped by the understanding that, as Merleau-Ponty pontificates in his 1948 text *The World of Perception*; the individual cannot be rendered separate from the space he or she occupies.⁵³⁷ Recalling Merleau-Pontian concepts of the body, space presents an

⁵³³ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.98.

⁵³⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.98.

⁵³⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp.99-100.

⁵³⁶ As Merleau-Ponty further explicates: 'Psychologists often say that the body is dynamic. Brought down to a precise sense, this term means that my body appears to me as an attitude directed towards a certain existing or possible task. And indeed its spatiality is not, like that of external objects or like that of 'spatial sensations' a spatiality of position, but a spatiality of situation' (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.100).

⁵³⁷ 'We can no longer draw an absolute distinction between space and the things which occupy it, nor indeed between the pure idea of space and the concrete spectacle it presents to our senses'. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The World of Perception*, trans. by Oliver Davis (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p.51.

experience in which the body is fundamentally embedded, and any movement within the space effects changes within the body. The character of a performance poetry space thus co-operates with the affective negotiations manifested through spoken word performance. Discussing the dynamism of the body in motion⁵³⁸ I argue Merleau-Ponty clearly articulates the importance of a medium such as performance poetry for exemplifying a deeper, pedagogical understanding of our experience of space. Operatively, Merleau-Ponty posits the value of denuding 'the commonplaceness of established situations':

it is clearly in action that the spatiality of our body is brought into being, and an analysis of one's own movement should enable us to arrive at a better understanding of it. By considering the body in movement, we can see better how it inhabits space (and, moreover, time) because movement is not limited to submitting passively to space and time, it actively assumes them, it takes them up in their basic significance which is obscured in the commonplaceness of established situations.⁵³⁹

In the course of my proceeding analysis I take up the significance of this notion through an investigation of the role performance poetry plays in re-examining the everyday space through engaging the body within a space of performance. To return to Wendelin Küpers' analysis of the interrelation between Merleau-Pontian phenomenology and affective potential Küpers presents the

⁵³⁸ As I have argued in this chapter, I take motion to absolutely incorporate both performer and spectator of a performance poem as affectively active participants within a performance event.

⁵³⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.102.

revitalization of the everyday as a necessarily social reality: 'Affects and inter-affectations are depleting or enhancing transitions of intensities through the influences of embodied realities that are always already cultural and social'.⁵⁴⁰ He evokes Teresa Brennan in his discussion of the social mechanism of affect transmission whereby one educates the senses by, among other things, overcoming the illusion of self-containment.⁵⁴¹ From a phenomenological perspective the dictum Küpers presents: 'to experience an affective happening is to process, realize or to enact a moving relation to the phenomenal world'⁵⁴² suggests that the experience of an 'affective happening' must necessarily be located in a shared (social) space: 'Occurring in encounters, affects are thus part of the relationships between manifold beings. The outcome of each of these encounters depends upon what form of composition these beings are able to enter into'.⁵⁴³ By re-examining the spatial element of the experience of performance poetry through a phenomenological lens it is possible to establish a firmer outline of the pedagogical potential latent in performance poetry⁵⁴⁴, or as Küpers articulates, a potential for 'radical transformational shifting':

⁵⁴⁰ Küpers, p.159.

⁵⁴¹ In the footnotes to his text Küpers elaborates on the debt owed to Brennan's research in *the transmission of affect*: 'For Brennan the transmission of affect is social in origin, and works via bodies as media (and hormonal exchange), which create affective resonances independent of content or meaning, causing bio-physical effects and physiological shifts... Basically all forms of communication, whether facial expressions, respiration, tone of voice, sounds or postures are perceptible, and can transmit affect' (p.159, Küpers).

⁵⁴² Küpers, p.159.

⁵⁴³ Küpers, p.154.

⁵⁴⁴ Küpers clearly foregrounds his intention to establish the potential of affective experience as an educative process earlier in his analysis: 'Effectively, the pathetically tuned senses and body perceives the world in an affective modality of being, that makes living more intensive. With intensified affect then comes a stronger sense of embeddedness and heightened sense of inter-connection to "Others" or "othering" phenomena, including for example places, atmospheres, technologies, people, and so on in the larger field of life' (Küpers, p.156). Thus the 'radical transformational shifting' as Küpers indicates here is intimately linked to the kind of pedagogical application demonstrated by other critics evaluated in the course of my analysis.

Furthermore, that affects and emotion emerge as potential movement implies not only a particular bodily and relational orientation to the world and to others, but also that they carry a potential for radical transformational shifting... We not only feel moved by something, but also are moved to do something, to take an action and move others.⁵⁴⁵

Utilizing a phenomenological basis for my enquiry into the potential of performance poetry thus forms a bridge between my analysis of the role of affect in performance and my subsequent examination of shared performance spaces.

⁵⁴⁵ Küpers, p.160.

Chapter three

Space and Performance Poetry

The framework of phenomenological enquiry I have established in my preceding chapter necessitates an investigation into the spaces in which the affective transmissions of performance poetry occur. It is my contention that through an analysis of the relationship between space and performance in the context of a number of key phenomenological scholars, a robust defence for the value of spoken word in contemporary society may be posited. This defence will take the form of a re-negotiation of the role performance poetry takes in the production of social spaces and the dis-alienation of everyday life through the occupation of performance spaces. Building upon relationships established in my previous chapter between phenomenological experience and spatial occupation (and the implications this shared, social element holds for an effective affect-driven education of the senses) this chapter further reinforces my argument regarding the pedagogical value of performance poetry. In this chapter I explore the contemporary spaces occupied by performance poetry events with reference to first hand experiences from performance poets and spoken word organizers. In shaping a referential frame for my contention that spoken word performances can occupy a variety of spaces I present a discussion regarding the ways in which spaces, in the context of performance, are constituted or enabled. This opens my argument to an examination of the roles of both performer and audience within the space created. As I have argued previously, performers and audience all contribute

to the affective potential of the spoken word experience. Discussing how this collaboration is enacted within a shared space I reference the work of French philosopher Jacques Rancière, specifically his text *The Emancipated Spectator* (first published in English in 2009).⁵⁴⁶ The notion of the audience as a collection of passive spectators is frustrated by the affective co-relationships formed through performance which I have previously established. An analysis of Rancière, who focused specifically on the relationships between performer and audience within the performance space, and subsequently of the work of the theatre critic Gay McAuley permits a shift in my argument from an interrogation of the affective turn to an interrogation of the spatial turn in the late twentieth-century.

In her text *Space in performance: making meaning in the theatre* (1999) McAuley continues the arguments established by Rancière, positing a spatiality of the theatre which is fundamentally inscribed by the relationships between performers and audience.⁵⁴⁷ She recalls in all but name the importance of affect in this spatial production: 'the space in relation to oneself... the 'feeling' (whatever that is) of being in a theatre'.⁵⁴⁸ This can be analysed in the context of Bob Holman's *Slam Disclaimer*.⁵⁴⁹ As a popular poem performed at the introduction to many Slams this serves as a tacit reinforcement of the shared importance of bodily presence to both an affective and a live spatial field of analysis:

⁵⁴⁶ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2011).

⁵⁴⁷ Gay McAuley, *Space in performance: making meaning in the theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999).

⁵⁴⁸ McAuley, p.256.

⁵⁴⁹ It is difficult to find an exact date for the composition of this poem, however it has been cited in a number of texts including: Marc Kelly Smith and Joe Kraynak, *Stage a Poetry Slam: Creating Performance Poetry Events-Insider Tips, Backstage Advice, and Lots of Examples* (Naperville: Sourcebooks Inc., 2009).

Yes, we must destroy
ourselves in the constant
reformation that is this very moment
and propel you to write the poems
as poets read them⁵⁵⁰

Armed with a justification for approaching the question of space and spatial production as being intimately connected to feeling and to bodily negotiations, I turn to the critical frontier of spatiality and the ways in which studies of space have shaped the development of theories of interactions within social spaces. This encounter with the spatial turn anticipates an engagement with the value of experiences in the phenomenological mode I have established, examining the pedagogical function of shared space through performance.

Through a negotiation of Modernism and the problems of the Modernist obsession with time and temporality, the French critic and philosopher Michel Foucault presents the 'epoch of space', first articulated in his 1984 article 'Of Other Spaces', an epoch which anticipated and sustained the spatial turn in the twentieth-century.⁵⁵¹ This turn fixed space as a dominant site of enquiry, privileging spatial concerns, and foregrounding a deeper understanding of the way in which

⁵⁵⁰ Cristin O'Keefe Aptowicz, *Words In Your Face: A guided tour through twenty years of the New York City Poetry Slam* (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2008), pp.30-31.

⁵⁵¹ Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces' trans. by Jay Miskowiec, in *Diacritics*, Vol. 16. No. 1 (1986), pp.22-27. For further critique and analysis of the spatial turn, see: Barney Werf and Santa Arias, *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2009); Phil Hubbard, et al (eds.), *Key Thinkers on Space and Place* (London: Sage, 2004); Michael J. Dear and Steven Flusty, *The Spaces of Postmodernity: Readings in Human Geography* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002).

communities created and maintained social spaces. Foucault's presentation of heterotopias in this article is crucial to understanding how performance poetry can enable an active renegotiation of spaces and foster and promote the creation of social spaces. Through a successive analysis of Foucault's six principles of heterotopology in the context of the performance poetry space I posit the implicit correlation between the spoken word stage and the heterotopic space.

To clarify the problems that emerge when one takes this argumentation and applies it to the theatre space or the space of the traditional poetry reading I refer to the work of the theatre critic Patrick Primavesi.⁵⁵² Primavesi's study of heterotopias in the dominant theatre of the nineteenth century is critical to my investigation, however it must first be read in the context of an analysis of developments in spatial occupation in theatre of the period.⁵⁵³ The widening of legitimized performance spaces effected by the mid-1800s Theatre Acts frames the context of Primavesi's arguments regarding the ways in which public and social spaces operated as performance spaces. However, as can be evidenced in the relative paucity of academic study of nineteenth century theatre (a paucity which is analogous to the volume of critical engagement with contemporary performance poetry) the opening up of social spaces for performance did not constitute a successful re-evaluation of the pedagogical value of this relocation of potential spaces. Through Primavesi's analysis I initiate a discussion of sites of performance:

⁵⁵² Patrick Primavesi, 'Heterotopias of the Public Sphere: Theatre and Festival around 1800', in *Performance and the Politics of Space: Theatre and Topology*, ed. by Erika Fischer-Lichte, Benjamin Wihstutz (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp.166-182.

⁵⁵³ For further background analysis of the implications of theatre of this period see: Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction: 2nd edition*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

the theatre or the space of the poetry reading, which may in fact circumscribe the production of social spaces through the subsequent establishment of (in Primavesi's terms) a bourgeois ideology of performance spaces: 'Theatre fervour and "theatromania" were deemed harmful excesses of affect and fantasy, an escape from reality and a sign of moral decay. The fundamental ambivalence of the bourgeoisie's attitude toward the theatre was finally expressed in the attempt to discipline the behaviour of performers and spectators, and to channel the desire to transgress everyday conventions'.⁵⁵⁴ Significantly, Primavesi establishes a contrast between the conditioned theatrical space and the festival space as a site of excess. The festival is crucial to the final element of my analysis of the spaces occupied by spoken word. To prepare for this analysis I have included an interview I conducted with a performance poet who has also worked extensively in traditional theatre. The interview includes a discussion of the ways in which relationships to space and the occupation of space differ in different modes of performance and posits potential explanations and responses to the current paucity of spoken word in the UK compared to its presence in the US.

The final element of my analysis concerns the festival in relation to the work of Henri Lefebvre and Martin Heidegger. I argue that the relationship between performance poetry and representations of social spaces as heterotopias of the festive can be further reinforced by Lefebvre's insistence on the materiality of spatial negotiations, and the uniqueness by which spoken word relates to Heidegger's concept of art and the capacity of the festive space to relegate the

⁵⁵⁴ Primavesi, p.170.

‘enframing’ potential of the everyday.⁵⁵⁵ A Lefebvrian approach to representations of space draws together elements of my enquiry into the relationship between affect and space through phenomenological approaches underpinned by Lefebvre’s insistence on the importance of the body. The conclusions that can be reached from Lefebvre’s assertions regarding the fundamentality of the material body reinforce the connection between spatial production and the affective processes enacted by performance poetry in the performance space. From a Heideggerian perspective, ‘the opening up of a world’ is achieved through poetics, and through representation within a space which enables rather than forecloses such opening.⁵⁵⁶ In both approaches (underpinned by a discussion of heterotopias and the festive space) performance poetry can be interpreted as exemplary for the production and maintenance of social spaces. This production is, in essence, pedagogical as it educates and protects against the very real threat of alienation posed by the everyday space which circumscribes rather than facilitates social interaction. In this respect, a spatial analysis of performance poetry offers a strong defence for its inclusion within the social and cultural landscape of twenty-first century poetics.

⁵⁵⁵ The concept of ‘enframing’, or ‘Gestell’ was introduced by Heidegger in a 1949 lecture ‘The Framework’ (Das Gestell), and consolidated in his 1954 text *The Question Concerning Technology*: Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. by William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).

⁵⁵⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), p.44.

Contemporary spaces for spoken word

One may argue that there exists an established tradition of locating a poetry reading in a space which engenders connotations with literature and with literary study, for example the library, or, to reinforce the tacit relationship between poetics and the academy, the university space. Contrary to this, there has been an increasing trend over the last few years which dictates a movement of the performance of poetry into spaces which serve the function of recreational, social spaces. Increasingly, at a community level, spoken word performances and events can be found in pubs, cafes, and on variety club stages. Testaments to this are the experiences of London based performance poet Laurie Bolger who has supported my exploration into contemporary UK performance poetry with a wealth of first-hand information regarding the current spoken word scene in the UK. Currently Bolger hosts one of London's leading performance poetry night BANG Said the Gun and also organizes a range of poetry events at Camden Roundhouse - one of the most prominent and iconic venues for spoken word in the UK.⁵⁵⁷ Alongside this she was recently appointed London's lead facilitator for BBC 1Xtra's Words First as well as being one of London's young poet Laureates. This role requires her to host and perform at a variety of events including The Mayor's Dinner, and the opening of the Olympic Swimming Pool. Bolger notes that the kinds of spaces she performs in also extend to streets, factories, and pop up performances in garden sheds. When

⁵⁵⁷ Laura Thornley, 'Somewhere you should go... Poetry Slam at The Roundhouse', *The Cultural Exposé*, 9/8/12 < <http://www.theculturalexpose.co.uk/what-to-do-in-london/somewhere-you-should-go-poetry-slam-at-the-roundhouse/>> [accessed 28 June 2016].

questioned whether, based on the variety of spaces Bolger has utilized for performance events, there were any spaces that did not work for spoken word she responded: 'Not really. I think you can take it anywhere to be honest. I think the space is definitely changed by performance and that's what makes it so fun isn't it? Poetry can go anywhere'.⁵⁵⁸ In 2015 Bolger hosted the poetry stage at LOVEBOX festival and Shambala festival to audiences of well over a thousand. She also performed at Camp Bestival, a role which also required her to present spoken word workshops for groups of teenagers, a pedagogical element of her practice which is supported by her work with primary schools at Story festivals in various locations across the UK.

Bolger's prominence and wide experience on the performance poetry scene makes her an able candidate to speak about the kind of spaces utilized by contemporary spoken word in the UK. When asked whether the spoken word scene had changed much over the last few years, both in terms of number and variety of events available she suggested that:

I think there's a lot more variety now and the scene is opening up to people who are not necessarily into poetry. You've got nights like BANG Said the Gun and Tongue Fu that reach bigger venues such as Udderbelly⁵⁵⁹ and Roundhouse and the punters might have never heard

⁵⁵⁸ Laurie Bolger, interviewed by Jack McGowan, 17 September 2015.

⁵⁵⁹ A custom performance space which comprises a large tent in the shape of an inflatable purple cow which can be transported to different festivals around the country.

poetry before but because it is fun and most importantly accessible the word gets out and people love it!⁵⁶⁰

Pursuing the distinction between event and expectation invites the question of how different spaces encode different expectations. As Bolger hints in her commentary on the different spaces opening for spoken word around the UK, the audiences that attend these varied events have preconceived notions shaped in large part by the kind of spaces inhabited. Addressing the question of to what extent the utilization of traditionally social spaces has developed through spoken word events and performances Bolger states that: 'I think it takes it back to the bardic tradition of getting up on a bar stall and reading your poems and hoping that someone gives you a glass of gin or a bed in return. The first time I ever performed poetry was at Poems in Pubs, the UK's first poetry pub crawl'.⁵⁶¹ This kind of engagement with social spaces underlies the potential manifested by performance poetry's shift towards incorporating affect and the body into the poetic process. Not only does spoken word inculcate the physical body within the poetics it also addresses the need to reconcile the production and receipt of poetry with the public, social body. This notion of audience expectation and receipt bears out in Bolger's own experiences:

I think the stereotype of poetry for a lot of people is of a lectern and quill, and a polite audience adjusting their monocles and clapping politely like they are watching cricket. But poetry can be sweaty and

⁵⁶⁰ Bolger, interviewed by Jack McGowan.

⁵⁶¹ Bolger, interviewed by Jack McGowan.

loud too and the more risks I take to bring it to audiences outside of ticketed literary events the more exciting it becomes. I also think with BANG that we create a poetry party from the minute people walk in the door. People start reading that the room has such high energy but is also so engaged with what the performer is saying and are with them all the way.⁵⁶²

The profusion of high energy in the performance space is certainly in keeping with descriptions of the affective qualities of spoken word performances. The fact that this affect is brought within the social space creates a different dimension for both audience and performer. The meeting of poetry within a social space facilitates an experience which, certainly for Bolger, is preferable to the conventional spatial landscape for the reception of poetry: 'I love reading at prestigious literary venues of course I do! I'm a writer! But sometimes it's nice to take risks and battle a bit to make people listen, and then find that they genuinely feel it. I love venues like Southbank and Keats Houses with all my poetic guts but to be honest my favourite gig will always be a grubby local pub with punters and poets alike'.⁵⁶³ Discussion of the appropriation of social spaces as performance venues naturally invites an exploration of the strong connections between community and the development of contemporary spoken word. For Bolger, the apex of community engagement with spoken word finds purchase by bringing performance poetry to social spaces and thus by bringing poetry to audiences that would not otherwise conventionally engage with it: 'As much as I respect the lectern and the fifteen pound a ticket vibe

⁵⁶² Bolger, interviewed by Jack McGowan.

⁵⁶³ Bolger, interviewed by Jack McGowan.

and the audience being genuine poetry lovers, I feel like sometimes poetry is a bit cut off to people outside the scene and that's why the public engagement stuff is so rewarding and important'.⁵⁶⁴ This of course invites an antecedent argument regarding the manifestation of value both in the social space and the academic space, and the subsequent derivation of high and low cultures. Concluding our interview, I invited Bolger to discuss how both spoken word audiences and spaces have changed during her time engaging with the performance poetry scene in the UK. Her response indicated the necessity of spoken word as a tool to reconsider the binaries of value inherent to the separation of page and stage: 'I think we bring in a fairly varied crowd these days. Spoken Word is becoming much more mainstream so you have the academic page poetry lot and then the hipster crowd but this can only be a good thing when they meet together to celebrate great writing full of genuine personality and that's what BANG Said the Gun does for me'.⁵⁶⁵ Bolger's impression of the contemporary spoken word scene in the UK is illuminating when one considers the variety of individuals and audiences engaging with performance poetry. Ultimately, her perspective on the role performance poetry plays in shaping public impressions of poetry and its cultural identity centralizes feeling and affective engagement:

I think you do have to cater for your audience and gauge what they'd like to hear but at the same time I have learnt recently that just because you're in front of a thousand business people or academics doesn't mean you have to read tame or clever stuff. They want poetry to move

⁵⁶⁴ Bolger, interviewed by Jack McGowan.

⁵⁶⁵ Bolger, interviewed by Jack McGowan.

them and the same as performing at Keats House or in a carpark in Stoke, people will always take something from what you read and to be honest I think if you can do that, and take some risks but keep you voice consistent and not try to tick boxes the whole time then you're bloody sorted!⁵⁶⁶

This appropriation of social space is of great importance when one considers the function of the performance poem or the performance poetry event within a society; however, my critical analysis of performance spaces goes beyond types of locations commonly associated with performance poetry events. As Bolger asserts in her final comment, affect transmission is of primary importance over the specificities of space, reminding us that: 'Poetry can go anywhere'.⁵⁶⁷ Indeed, in her chapter 'Policies of Spatial Appropriation' in the edited collection *Performance and the Politics of Space* (2013) the theatre and performance critic Erika Fischer-Lichte suggests that in contemporary performance practice: 'It has become almost impossible to find a space that has not, at one time or another, been considered suitable for performances'.⁵⁶⁸ The relationship between audience and performer is critical to understanding how this movement out of the traditional structure of fixed location in the theatre may have occurred. Attending to a phenomenological interpretation of performance this is certainly true. From a phenomenological perspective performance (though crucially located in a performance space) does

⁵⁶⁶ Bolger, interviewed by Jack McGowan.

⁵⁶⁷ Bolger, interviewed by Jack McGowan.

⁵⁶⁸ Erika Fischer-Lichte, 'Policies of Spatial Appropriation', in *Performance and the Politics of Space: Theatre and Topology*, ed. by Erika Fischer-Lichte, Benjamin Wihstutz (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 219-239 (p.219).

not require specific encoded spaces to persist, only an affective engagement between bodies within that space.⁵⁶⁹ For Fischer-Lichte, the transition from traditional theatre spaces stems from a generalized dissatisfaction with the impositions established by the detachment of the theatre as a cultural institution from the everyday life of its patrons:

This development was rooted, among other things, in a general critique of theatre as a bourgeois institution. It was a reaction to the insularity of the theatre, and to the perceived distance between it and the daily life and work routines of the majority of the population, and against the impenetrable borders laid down by the strict division of the theatrical space into one area for actors and another for spectators. Therefore, the policies that underpinned theatre's appropriation of new spaces attempted to shift the threshold between the theatre and other domains of everyday life, create shared communities between actors and spectators, and institute a participatory form of democratic activity.⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁶⁹ This phenomenological link is demonstrated further in *Performance and Phenomenology Traditions and Transformations*: 'Performance, regardless of how broadly or narrowly we understand it, only takes place through the attendance of others; it can only begin to exist through the involvement of others to whom it can respond. There are many means by which performance persists, but as a phenomenon it arises utterly embedded in a perceptual world dependent on others' (Bleeker, p.8).

⁵⁷⁰ Fischer-Lichte, p.219.

Space and Spectatorship

Fischer-Lichte's analysis presupposes a prior consensus over the notion and identity of the spectator in her comparison with the relationship between audience (spectator) and performer. This relationship, which forms the site of affect transmission in performance poetry requires further examination before any theories concerning their shared occupation of space can be advanced. In order to construct the notion of the audience as a collective body of spectators by which I then address the relationship between of audience, performer, and space I refer to Jacques Rancière's *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009). Rancière establishes what he delineates the 'Paradox of the Spectator': there can be no theatre, no performance, without a spectator however the condition of spectatorship is antithetical to what Rancière determines the priority of performance to be, which is an activating process. Spectatorship is a necessary element of performance, however, as Rancière outlines: 'To be a spectator is to be separated from both the capacity to know and the power to act'.⁵⁷¹ For Rancière the traditional theatre as a site of performance or spectacle establishes and reiterates a distance between performer and audience: 'There is the distance between the artist and spectator, but there is also the distance inherent in the performance itself, in so far as it subsists, as a spectacle, an autonomous thing, between the idea of the artist and the sensation or comprehension of the spectator'.⁵⁷² Not only is bodily participation circumscribed

⁵⁷¹ Rancière, p.2.

⁵⁷² Rancière, p.14.

by the structure of the performance, but there is also an intractability of shared affective participation in the spectacle. In other words, the audience can't reach the apogee of emotional content because they are prevented from sharing a comprehension of the process by their own passive role within it. For Rancière, this passivity is the problematic element couched within any interaction between performer and audience: 'What human beings contemplate in the spectacle is the activity they have been robbed of, it is their own essence become alien, turned against them, organizing a collective world whose reality is that dispossession'.⁵⁷³

Rancière's arguments are formulated with regards to traditional theatre.⁵⁷⁴ However, the implications for spectatorship within theatrical or performance spaces can be extended to the performance of poetry. Within his critical analysis he distinguishes the bad practice in passive spectatorship from the potential theatre has, being one of the only places where the audience can 'confront[s] itself as a collective'.⁵⁷⁵ Indeed, he argues:

The separation of stage and auditorium is to be transcended. The precise aim of the performance is to abolish this exteriority in various ways: by placing the spectators on the stage and the performers in the auditorium; by abolishing the difference between the two; by transferring the performance to other sites; by identifying it with taking possession of the street, the town, or life.⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷³ Rancière, p.7.

⁵⁷⁴ For less traditional examples of resistance see: Peter Ansorge, *Disrupting the Spectacle: Five Years of Experimental and Fringe Theatre in Britain* (London: Pitman Publishing, 1975).

⁵⁷⁵ Rancière, p.5.

⁵⁷⁶ Rancière, p.15.

The spectators who have relinquished their power and consigned themselves to a role of passivity thus lack the power to grasp the plurality of the performance, which is accomplished by participation within the collective body of the audience. Rancière's emancipation is: 'the blurring of the boundary between those who act and those who look; between individuals and members of a collective body'.⁵⁷⁷ This notion of collective body which is at the forefront of Rancière's argument is worth defining as it veers perilously close to an equally circumscriptive, passive misunderstanding of the constitution and participation of the audience. As Rancière argues:

The collective power shared by spectators does not stem from the fact that they are members of a collective body or from some specific form of interactivity. It is the power each of them has to translate what she perceives in her own way, to link it to the unique intellectual adventure that makes her similar to all the rest in as much as this adventure is not like any other.⁵⁷⁸

Participation within the body of the audience does not contest a plurality of responses; rather it establishes the cohabitation of responses as a necessary realization if the audience is to escape the passivity of spectatorship. Rather than the perception of the collective body as a closed totality, it is vital they be perceived as an open totality of which each member is an active and constitutive participant. This is of course central to understanding performance through a

⁵⁷⁷ Rancière, p.19.

⁵⁷⁸ Rancière, pp.16-17.

phenomenological lens. As the editors argue in their introduction to *Performance and Phenomenology Traditions and Transformations* (2015):

Embodied reflection of the kind proposed by performance involves accepting that there is no perceiving the world without altering it and being altered by it. Performance stages this reflective emphasis because of its inherent contingency, its manner of appearing dependent on the shifting and malleable experiences of both performers and audience members.⁵⁷⁹

The affective composition of a performance poem, altered by both the performer and the audience members, creates a specific phenomenological experience of the performance which facilitates an exploration of one's role within the experience. Such exploration is intimately linked to the pedagogical value of performance poetry I outline. To expand upon this argument, the following quote from McAuley discusses the role of the spectator within the creative process:

If the performance event can be defined as what takes place between performers and spectators in a given space and time, then the spectator has to be seen as a crucial and active agent in the creative process. The spectators are physically present in the theatre space just as the performers are.⁵⁸⁰

Application of these theories to performance poetry reveals the alignment of new approaches to spectatorship with the development of spoken word as a

⁵⁷⁹ Bleeker, p.8.

⁵⁸⁰ McAuley, p.235.

prominent feature of the contemporary poetic landscape. Allied to a necessary reconstruction of spectatorship, performance poetry (particularly Slam Poetry) re-posit a phenomenological understanding of audience experience through a reaction against established connotations of audience in the traditional poetry reading.⁵⁸¹ It may be worth addressing a potential counterpoint to this thesis; for a general audience spoken word performance poetry enjoys a different set of connotations to page-based poetry and to the conventional 'poetry reading' which is firmly aligned and invested in the institution of the publishing industry. The poetry reading has been seen as a necessary element of marketing a new, printed collection of poems, the audience receipt (beyond the potential sales provoked by their enjoyment of the poetry) is thus not an end in and of itself. Further to this, one may argue therefore that the spoken word event anticipates of its audience something quite different from the audience of a poetry reading. The inquiry into the difference between 'page' and 'stage' poetry becomes one, almost, of demographics; how a spoken word audience (stage) is going to differ from the audience of a more conventional poetry reading (page), an audience who are in attendance for entirely different purposes. Following the logic of this argument presents a difficulty for the expression of a new vitality in performance poetry as it simply re-subscribes to the same exegetical position: performance poetry is new and vital not because of a quality it inherently possesses but because of the more

⁵⁸¹ Not only this, the role of the performer may also be reconsidered through a phenomenological enquiry: 'Phenomenology has provided contemporary performers with a language for thinking about how bodies operate and create meaning between each other. Concerned primarily with the structures of experience and perception, phenomenology speaks to fundamental concerns of performance-making, starting with questions about how audience members encounter performances' (Bleeker, p.4).

reserved, less affective connotations that underline its antithesis in this comparison: the poetry reading. I argue this is a simplification. As McAuley avers of 'mainstream theatre' which I take as analogous to my opposition between spoken word and the poetry reading:

Acknowledging that the audiences for mainstream theatre nowadays generally behave in a restrained manner, one may nevertheless question whether this necessarily denotes passivity: does being quiet equate with passivity? Is activity to be judged solely in terms of bodily mobility?⁵⁸²

McAuley's argument foregrounds the shared elements of the relationship between performer and spectator: 'In the exchange of energy that occurs in a good live performance, the audience gives as much to the actors as they give back'.⁵⁸³ She is keen to note that a new kind of spectatorship exists, one which has a productive role in the active experience of the spectacle:

The primary fact of theatre is, however, the live presence of both performers and spectators, and from this flow two major consequences for the spectator: first, theatre involves an energy exchange among and between spectators and performers, and, second, the performance is necessarily embedded in a social event.⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁸² McAuley, p.240.

⁵⁸³ McAuley, p.259.

⁵⁸⁴ McAuley, p.245.

Girded with the establishment of an emancipated, active audience and their performance of responses to the spectacle, shared occupation within a performance space can be critically assessed. Active (bodily) spectatorship demonstrates an awareness of and engagement with the affective construction of a performance. Performances which attempt to develop circumscriptive modes of audience receipt offer only fixed spatial relationships. Alternatively, performances which engage the audience as affective co-participants offer an opportunity to facilitate an education of the ways in which we affectively process bodily experience as meaning: 'Phenomenology provided an alternative and a complement to (structuralist) semiotic approaches while shifting from a generalized affirmation of 'the body's' experiences during performance towards thinking about bodies' construction of being and meaning'.⁵⁸⁵ What must thus be explored is the capacity for spoken word to redefine and renegotiate how space uses and is used through performance. What is encoded in the act of theatregoing for McAuley is a recognition of the space of the theatre as a constituent part of the feeling of spectatorship:

Experience of theatregoing teaches us to look at the stage, but the spectator in the theatre is always involved first and foremost in the phenomenological experience of being there, of the space in relation to oneself, of one's self in the place, of the 'height in the air', of the 'feeling' (whatever that is) of being in a theatre.⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁸⁵ Bleeker, p.4.

⁵⁸⁶ McAuley, p.256.

The unfocused designations McAuley offers in her analysis are clearly descriptions of affect. The whatever of 'feeling' and of 'height in the air' comprise the transmission of affect between theatregoers geared towards a shared experience of spectatorship. McAuley refuses in her argumentation to name this as such, even though the comparison is clear. When McAuley offers that: 'theatre makes demands on its audiences in intangible ways to contribute to the energy exchange'⁵⁸⁷, the transaction is affective – intangible yet insistent, the space creating a physiological demand on the bodies of the audience members to contribute to the shared affective experience. Presence is once again represented in the concluding statements of McAuley's text:

the spatial reality is paramount, for it is only because the spectators are really present in the auditorium that they can enjoy the shifts and turns in their consciousness of themselves, other spectators, the actors, and the dramatic fiction. It is evident, then, that space is at work in every aspect of the spectator's experience of the theatre event.⁵⁸⁸

An implicit connection is drawn between performance, affect, and space. The context of presence offers an interesting reinterpretation of the first few lines of Slam Poetry guru Bob Holman's famous *Slam Disclaimer*. Holman, one of the most seminal influences on the New York and US Slam poetry scene⁵⁸⁹, performs his *Slam*

⁵⁸⁷ McAuley, p.262.

⁵⁸⁸ McAuley, p.277.

⁵⁸⁹ Henry Louis Gates Jr., 'Sudden Def', *The New Yorker*, 19 June 1995
<<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1995/06/19/sudden-def>> [accessed 30 February 2014].

Disclaimer at the beginning of any Slam he hosts or competes in. The first few lines read as follows:

As Dr. Willie used to say,
We are gathered here today
Because we are not gathered
Somewhere else today⁵⁹⁰

Though on cursory inspection it appears to be a simple quip, I posit that Holman is effectively invoking not only presence but presence as part of a communal gathering, gearing the audience to engage in the transmission of affect. Despite the connections between bodily engagement (affect) and space, McAuley suggests that this element of interaction has been misrepresented in a critical, academic analysis of performance: 'Scholarly emphasis on play, production, and performance has tended to downplay the importance of the social experience occurring in the audience space'.⁵⁹¹ I contend that this may be a more complicated negotiation, and that the function of the social in performance theory does share some commonality with a major shift in criticism in the late twentieth century; a shift which has been labelled the spatial turn.

⁵⁹⁰ Cristin O'Keefe Aptowicz, *Words In Your Face: A guided tour through twenty years of the New York City Poetry Slam* (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2008), pp.30-31.

⁵⁹¹ McAuley, p.267.

Space: a critical frontier

In the late twentieth century, the landscape of literary criticism shifted. Alongside the affective turn, as analysed in my previous chapter, certain critics and theorists undertook a renegotiation of concepts of space and spatiality. The spatial turn encompassed a period of increased inter-disciplinary study, combining scholarship in the humanities and social sciences with the neogeographies of place, border, and community identity. Questions of capital power and production, which had stamped themselves upon literary criticism in the late 1960s and 1970s, found common ground with the socio-geographical examination of space and the use of space within a society. In his essay 'Of Other Spaces' Foucault observed:

The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein.⁵⁹²

Foucault's 'epoch of space' does not situate a distinct period whereby the spatial turn can be identified as having shifted critical understanding of the context of space and place, however it does encourage an analysis of dominant preoccupations in literary theory in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

⁵⁹² Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p.22.

Foucault's critical assessment of spatiality within society will be analysed in due course, but here I focus on his assertions regarding the nineteenth century obsession with time as fundamental to understanding the spatial turn in succeeding centuries. The French Revolution in 1789 cemented a fixation on a social narrative which was delineated by history.⁵⁹³ This centred around a then versus now ideology; systemic feudalism in the past and liberated identity in the present. The emergence of the historical novel at the beginning of the nineteenth century⁵⁹⁴, and the rise of professional analysis of historical developments of nations and societies, reinforced the authority of such a fixation. Temporality underpinned the manifestations of production in the literature of the period, as the spatial critic Robert T. Tally Jr suggests:

Foucault's sense that nineteenth-century philosophy had given pride of place to temporality and history is borne out in the vast literature of the era. For the most part, even with the developments in spatial knowledge, space was still viewed by philosophy as static, empty, and mere background to historical and temporal events. At the turn of the century, time trumped space as the main object of fascination for many writers and theorists.⁵⁹⁵

Reasons for the diminishment of time and history as a critical obsession remain unfixed, however points of justification for this shift curiously delineate along lines

⁵⁹³ Dale K. Van Kley, *The French Idea Of Freedom* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994).

⁵⁹⁴ Brian R. Hamnett, *The Historical Novel In Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁵⁹⁵ Robert T. Tally Jr., *Spatiality: The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2013), p.33.

of historical context.⁵⁹⁶ Further to this, the impact of societal fractures which forced critics to reassess notions of progressive community invigorated an analysis of diasporic identity and how that identity could be manifested in the art and literature of the dispossessed.⁵⁹⁷

For Foucault, the shift towards space and the diminishment of time was almost total: 'I believe that the anxiety of our era has to do fundamentally with space, no doubt a great deal more than with time. Time probably appears to us only as one of the various distributive operations that are possible for the elements that are spread out in space'.⁵⁹⁸ Such a fundamental redefinition of spatial fixity in response to the accompanying changes in post-war society and the blurring of boundaries between individual and space had great impact on all elements of society.⁵⁹⁹ Space, and the spatial turn as established under this critical lens must be interpreted as a vital element in the development and practice of performance

⁵⁹⁶ The literary critic Bertrand Westphal posits that the restructuring of society after the Second World War radically influenced the development of a framework supporting investment in space as a critical notion. Fixations on time, and the conception of history as an advancement of enlightened society towards an as yet undetermined, yet determinedly utopic goal, were destabilized by the fractures of global conflict. The result, for Westphal, indicated the necessity of a reorientation of values which underpinned our understanding of society and social structure: 'nature abhors a vacuum, and the weakening of traditional historicity, alongside the decoupling of time and progress, has made possible the valorizing rereading of space'. Bertrand Westphal, *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p.25.

⁵⁹⁷ As the critic George Steiner suggests: 'it seems proper that those who create art in a civilization of quasi-barbarism which has made so many homeless, which has torn up tongues and peoples by the root, should themselves be poets unhoused and wanderers across language'. George Steiner, *Extraterritorial: Papers on Literature and Language of Revolution* (New York: Atheneum, 1976), p.11.

⁵⁹⁸ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p.22.

⁵⁹⁹ Concomitant with such redefinitions, there was a shift in the conception of how space is used: 'the transformation of social space... affect the ways in which humans operate in space, 'use' space, and make sense of their various spatial and social relations. This changing role of spatiality in human history has real consequences for theory and practice. The spatial turn in modern and postmodern literary theory and criticism is an acknowledgment of the degree to which matters of space, place, and mapping had been under-represented in the critical literature of the past. The writers, critics and theorists whose work has directly or indirectly engaged with such matters in recent years attempt not only to remedy this former oversight, but to propose new ways of seeing a world in which many of the former certainties have become, at the very least, uncertain' (Tally Jr., p.16).

poetry. Spoken word performances are situated implicitly in social spaces by virtue of the shared experience of the medium, a virtue which Gay McAuley supports in her critique: 'The social experience enhances, even accentuates the individual's response to the performance'.⁶⁰⁰ The material spatial identity of the page, and of poetry on the page, can be compared against the exterior social codification of performance spaces. To quote further from Tally Jr: 'The spatial turn is thus a turn towards the world itself, towards an understanding of our lives as situated in a mobile array of social and spatial relations that, in one way or another, need to be mapped'.⁶⁰¹ The spatial appropriation enacted by verbal art such as performance poetry practices a radically different engagement with shared, social, world spaces than the proliferation of poetry on the page. I argue that the rise in popularity of spoken word towards the end of the twentieth century has been propagated and reinforced by the shift towards spatiality and the spatial turn.

Increased interest in performance poetry and the importance of space in literature is underscored by how literary criticism has reconditioned itself to the spatial turn. Placed in a historical chronology of movements in literary and philosophical discourse, post-war twentieth-century society was largely characterized by late-modern and post-modern thought. In his 1982 iconic study of Modernism; *All that is solid Melts into Air*, Marshall Berman states that a characteristic shared by modernists is that:

⁶⁰⁰ McAuley, p.248.

⁶⁰¹ Tally Jr., pp.16-17.

they are moved at once by a will to change – to transform both themselves and their world – and by a terror of disorientation and disintegration, of life falling apart. They all know the thrill and the dread of a world in which ‘all that is solid melts into air’.⁶⁰²

The relationship between this assessment of modernity and re-conceptions of an understanding of space implicates the transformative potential of the period, both radical and momentous, where the powerful vicissitudes of modern life necessitated a conceptual shift regarding social relations. In the realm of the theatre, this manifested itself in the break between institutional spaces and the occupation of social spaces as discussed earlier: ‘the departure from established theatres and the appropriation of new spaces represented a reaction to crises generated by bursts of modernization in society’.⁶⁰³ That these crises specifically precipitate a transformation of spatial occupations is explicitly related to the presence of affectively felt communities, and the absence of such within traditional performance spaces. The ‘will to change’ Berman cites is an alteration of the individual’s relationship with the world around them, articulated by the social sphere.⁶⁰⁴ Furthermore, Berman specifically impels the individual directly towards social interaction:

⁶⁰² Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), p.13.

⁶⁰³ Fischer-Lichte, p.234.

⁶⁰⁴ This transformation of social space is supported by late twentieth-century writers and scholars such as the French critic George Perec. Perec’s text *Species of Spaces*, first published as ‘Espaces d’espaces’ in 1974 and translated into English in 1997: George Perec, *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* (London: Penguin Books, 1997) supports the desire to reimagine everyday spaces in order to recognize their complicity in producing lived experience: ‘We live in space, in these spaces, these towns, this countryside, these corridors, these parks [...] It’s real, obviously, and as a consequence most likely rational. We can touch. We can even allow ourselves to dream. There’s nothing, for

I believe that communication and dialogue have taken on a new specific weight and urgency in modern times, because subjectivity and inwardness have become at once richer and more intensely developed, and more lonely and entrapped, than they ever were before. In such a context, communication and dialogue become both a desperate need and a primary source of delight. In a world where meanings melt into air, these experiences are among the few solid sources of meaning we can count on. One of the things that can make modern life worth living is the enhanced opportunities it offers us--and sometimes even forces on us--to talk together, to reach and understand each other. We need to make the most of these possibilities; they should shape the way we organize our cities and our lives.⁶⁰⁵

Berman's analysis of the modern condition precipitates exactly the kind of transformative opportunities engendered by performance poetry. Inculcated within such opportunity, verbal art offers the audience a profound sense of engagement with the social and the communicative. Although the cultural significance of communication through the medium of text offers communicative potential, the spoken word does so without the divisive potential inherent to Berman's conflation of subjectivity and inwardness with loneliness and entrapment.

example, to stop us from imagining things that are neither towns nor countryside (nor suburbs), or Metro corridors that are at the same time public parks' (Perec, p.5).

⁶⁰⁵ Berman, pp.8-9.

True consensus within critical circles as to the boundaries of Modernism is notoriously absent⁶⁰⁶. An analysis of contemporary poetics, and the role of performance within such, cannot rest solely upon a theoretical position so circumscribed by the doubt and obfuscation common to Modernist thought.⁶⁰⁷ In drawing a tacit line between the development of contemporary performance poetry and the possibilities engendered by the development of the spatial turn it must be recognized that Modernism begat theoretical positions which jostle for position in the corpus of contemporary literary and philosophical thought. This said, the prominence of the spatial turn has not been diminished by the advent of postmodern critical theory. In his text *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) the Marxist theorist Frederic Jameson refers to 'that new spatiality implicit in the postmodern'.⁶⁰⁸ Further reinforcing the spatial turn as a distinct shift away from the temporal, and perpetuating the social element so visible in performance poetry which Berman encourages, Jameson posits that: 'our daily life, our psychic experiences, our cultural languages, are dominated by categories of space rather than by categories of time'.⁶⁰⁹ Within the framework of postmodern thought, spatiality still retains a direct relationship to the extent that Robert T. Tally Jr contends: 'The recent spatial turn in literary and cultural studies

⁶⁰⁶ For further interrogation of this absent consensus see, for example: Rainer Emig, *Modernism In Poetry: Motivations, Structures and Limits* (London: Longman, 1995), or Michael Schmidt, *Reading Modern Poetry* (London: Routledge, 1989).

⁶⁰⁷ This is particularly important considering the absence of performance poetics within the contemporary academy, and the necessity to provide a robust defence of its value.

⁶⁰⁸ Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), p.418.

⁶⁰⁹ Jameson, p.16.

has, for the most part, been a product of, or response to, the postmodern condition'.⁶¹⁰

To suggest that the fact that spatial elements so dominantly exist in postmodern theory uniquely justifies the rise of performance poetry in contemporary poetics is certainly a complicated argument. Jameson stipulates the 'waning of affect' in the postmodern character, drawing a correlation between affect and temporality: 'The waning of affect, however, might also have been characterized, in the narrower context of literary criticism, as the waning of the great high modernist thematics of time and temporality'.⁶¹¹ This criticism explicitly stands against one of the critical faculties of the performance poem; the transmission of affect. However, the case made for performance poetry relies not on its position within a corpus of postmodern theory. The invocation of late modernism and postmodernism serves to establish and to justify both the significance and the perseverance of the spatial turn in literary and philosophical thinking throughout the last few decades. This in hand, the role space plays in the delineation of performance poetry requires further analysis. The art and literature that is created by a society is influenced by its interrelationship with space, as Tally Jr. argues:

the material, historical bases underlying human social relations have also produced different spaces... these spaces have had to be addressed in novel ways. With respect to literary and cultural productions, these

⁶¹⁰ Tally Jr., p.38.

⁶¹¹ Jameson, p.16.

spaces call for new cartographic approaches, new forms of representation, and new ways of imagining our place in the universe. Space, place, and mapping, then, are crucial to literary and cultural studies, just as these concepts and practices are required for living in an ever-changing social and geographical milieu.⁶¹²

It is through the importance that space holds in our social structures that I contend the respective importance of performance poetry as a medium which most radically interacts with these spaces. Through affective-phenomenological experience the performance of poetry changes the spaces we occupy. In order to ground this contention, I return to Michel Foucault's discussion of space (particularly Foucault's presentation of heterotopias) in response to the configuration of social performance spaces. It is important to note at this juncture that by extending my phenomenological methodology across an investigation of Foucault's work I encounter clear problems in Foucault's rejection of phenomenology.⁶¹³ However, as Todd May proposes in his essay 'Foucault's Relation to Phenomenology', Foucault's rejection of phenomenology is a little more complicated: 'although Foucault rejects phenomenology in both his method and his content, he retains what might be called the spirit or motivation behind the phenomenological project'.⁶¹⁴ One may

⁶¹² Tally Jr., pp.42-43.

⁶¹³ In Foucault's *The Order of Things* originally published in French in 1966 Foucault states: 'If there is one approach that I do reject, however, it is that (one might call it, broadly speaking, the phenomenological approach) which gives absolute priority to the observing subject, which attributes a constituent role to an act, which places its own point of view at the origin of all historicity – which, in short, leads to a transcendental consciousness.' Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Random House, 1970), p.xiv.

⁶¹⁴ Todd May, 'Foucault's Relation to Phenomenology', in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault, Second edition*, ed. by Gary Gutting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp.284-312 (p.285).

be forgiven for thinking that this appears on the surface to be a rather tenuous defence but May proffers a robust analysis of the trajectory of Foucault's thought from early essays explicitly in favour of phenomenology⁶¹⁵, to his engagement with phenomenological psychology⁶¹⁶, and most pertinently the elements of Foucault's later thought which mirror his earlier phenomenological enquiries:

The phenomenologically inspired Foucault sees the obstacle to asking the question of who we might be as a certain form of explanatory reductionism. Phenomenology resists the reduction of human experience to objective categories. It seeks to reanimate human experience, and thus places its focus on the living human subject. The later Foucault resists another kind of reductionism, one that might be called 'categorical reductionism.' It is the reduction of human experience to essential or ontological or natural categories. This reductionism, like the explanatory reductionism rejected by phenomenology, blunts our ability to ask the question of who we might be by severely circumscribing the answers available to us.⁶¹⁷

⁶¹⁵ May offers two of Foucault's essays in particular: Michel Foucault, 'Dream, imagination and existence', in *Review of Existential Psychology & Psychiatry*, Vol 19. Issue 1 (1984-1985), pp.29-78, written in 1952 in response to the work of the Swiss psychiatrist Ludwig Binswanger, and 'Maladie mentale et personnalité' published by *Presses Universitaires de France* in 1954. The original English translation of the latter is replicated in: Michel Foucault, *Mental Illness and Psychology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976) and contains a thoroughly updated version of the original. It is between the two different versions of this essay that May positions Foucault's shift away from phenomenology.

⁶¹⁶ For closer analysis see the following interview conducted with Foucault: Duccio Trombadori, 'Interview with Michel Foucault', in *The Essential Works of Foucault Volume 3: Power 1954-1984*, ed. by James D. Faubion (London: Penguin Books, 2002), pp.239-298.

⁶¹⁷ May, p.307.

The consequence of analysing Foucault's engagement with both his earlier phenomenological methodology and his later, more archaeological-genealogical approach under a lens of reduction allows one to trace a sustained thematic:

As Foucault's thought matures, the character of what is 'heavy and oppressive' changes. But what is at issue – who we are, who we might be – remains the same. In the end, Foucault leaves phenomenology, but the spirit of phenomenology does not leave him.⁶¹⁸

It also enables an application of Foucault in the precise context of a phenomenological enquiry into space utilized through performance poetry. Across Foucauldian thought, as May argues, the challenge posed is to interrogate categories of existence which reduce lived experience to themselves. I contend that this interrogation finds apt purchase in an evaluation of how everyday space is utilized. Furthermore, I argue the relationship between Foucault's critical understanding of heterotopias can be accurately mapped to phenomenological experiences of a performance space which, through performance enacted within the space, radically contests reduction.

⁶¹⁸ May, pp.307-308.

Spoken word, theatre, and heterotopia

Foucault's development of heterotopias, articulated in his article 'Of Other Spaces' delineates a framework for separating non-hegemonic spaces of otherness from traditional ordered spaces; utopic spaces. His analysis is predicated by an understanding of oppositions that are inherent to everyday life, and suggests that these oppositions permeate the utilization of space to such an extent that they present what Foucault tentatively refers to as an inviolable organizing structure:

perhaps our life is still governed by a certain number of oppositions that remain inviolable, that our institutions and practices have not yet dared to break down. These are oppositions that we regard as simple givens: for example between private space and public space, between family space and social space, between cultural space and useful space, between the space of leisure and that of work.⁶¹⁹

A position established upon the concept of opposition is important to an application of Foucault's theories to the use of space in the context of performance poetry because of the radical mutability of the performance space. The capacity spoken word has to persistently alter a space through affect, and thus to resist the category reduction of an institutionally governed designation allows occupation of the space to escape the problems inherent to these oppositions by constantly inhabiting different spatial identities. Performance poetry operates through the

⁶¹⁹ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p.23.

utility of a site which, underpinned by the fluctuation of such spatial oppositions, resists identification under a permanent structure or function.⁶²⁰ This resistance stems from the principle that spaces for performance poetry are formed elementarily by the performances themselves, and can be operatively changed or adapted through the performance and the subsequent transmission of affect within the space. Discussing frameworks of site and space mobilizes distinctions between function as intention and function as utility; the designation or identity of a space, and the actual living use of a space. Foucault offers a critique of the former by noting that our lived space is not stable and defined:

The space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the space that gnaws and claws at us, is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space. In other words, we do not live in a kind of void, inside of which we could place individuals and things. We do not live inside a void that could be coloured with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another.⁶²¹

One could argue that the social spaces in which performance poetry is so often practiced - the pub, the café, the theatre - are all sites functioning for a particular practice or role. Foucault poses that sites can be codified under function if we accept a tacit identity composed from the sets of relations which contribute to the

⁶²⁰ The rational identity of the utopic site.

⁶²¹ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p.23.

uses of the site. Relating to the context of the social sites I raise as common examples of performance poetry venues, Foucault offers that: 'One could describe, via the cluster of relations that allows them to be defined, the sites of temporary relaxation - cafes, cinemas, beaches'.⁶²² However, Foucault contends that certain sites may have functional identities, but simultaneously challenge codification under set relations:

But among all these sites, I am interested in certain ones that have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect.⁶²³

Through the transformative potential of affect within the space, spaces of performance poetry can be identified as examples of sites which effect the same mechanisms Foucault considers in his analysis. They are impermanent sites of social engagement which can adapt to function under a varied spectra of explorative social encounters delineated by the emotional contexts or the assumed affective purposes of the performances. Designations of set relations forming sites of relaxation; the structures which commonly host performance poetry, are manipulated through the active, energetic, and bodily transactions of the performance and the phenomenological experience of being in these spaces. I contend that this presents the performance poetry space as a heterotopic space following Foucault's definition of heterotopias:

⁶²² Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p.24.

⁶²³ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p.24.

There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places – places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society – which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted... Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias.⁶²⁴

The heterotopia is an othering of rationalized utopias, a space which functions as a non-hegemonic site for exploration and representation of fixed spaces. Some critics have identified within this framework of non-location a sense of detachment which cannot be reconciled with progressive social reengagement. The academic Walter Russell Mead suggests in his critique of Post-Modernism that 'Utopia is a place where everything is good; dystopia is a place where everything is bad; heterotopia is where things are different – that is, a collection whose members have few or no intelligible connections with one another'.⁶²⁵ Mead argues that this fragmentation is a perception of a post-modern state which has lost a sense of the progressive. Rather than experiencing affect as possibility: 'contradictions intensify but are not resolved'.⁶²⁶ Far from a dynamic potential space, much like the fixed utopias, 'Heterotopias are essentially static'.⁶²⁷ I contend that this interpretation runs the

⁶²⁴ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p.24.

⁶²⁵ Walter Russell Mead, 'Trains, Planes, and Automobiles: The End of the Postmodern Moment', in *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 12. Issue No. 4 (1995/1996), pp.13-31 (p.13).

⁶²⁶ Mead, p.14.

⁶²⁷ Mead, p.14.

gamut of misattributing non-designation as impotence by falling under the auspice of a necessarily grand, necessarily non-material ideology. This perspective fails to fully recognize the potential of affect transmission to give shape not only to heterotopic spaces, but to social engagement within these spaces. In evidence of this, performance spaces are an excellent example of the heterotopia as an active rather than a static space.

In 'Of Other Spaces' Foucault establishes six principles of heterotopology, which is to say, a 'simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live'.⁶²⁸ Each of these six principles can be applied to performance poetry spaces in order to substantiate their identity as heterotopias. Foucault's first principle applies to the totality of the heterotopia as a space within human society:

Its first principle is that there is probably not a single culture in the world that fails to constitute heterotopias. That is a constant of every human group. But the heterotopias obviously take quite varied forms, and perhaps no one absolutely universal form of heterotopia would be found.⁶²⁹

Foucault presents two main categories in which these forms can be identified; the heterotopia of crisis and the heterotopia of deviation. Crucially, these are diachronic categories; heterotopias of deviation having succeeded and largely replaced heterotopias of crisis, which Foucault relegates to more primitive social structures: 'But these heterotopias of crisis are disappearing today and are being

⁶²⁸ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p.24.

⁶²⁹ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p.24.

replaced, I believe, by what we might call heterotopias of deviation: those in which individuals whose behaviour is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed'.⁶³⁰ The exemplar Foucault uses is the prison, or the psychiatric hospital – which offer a realized space for the separation of deviant behaviour within a society. However, within the loose structure delineating such categories I contend that the site of performance poetry is an apt continuation of the notional distinction Foucault makes between deviance and norm, albeit a less extreme one. One of the defining elements which compounds the experience of the spoken word stage is the fact that it provides both space and opportunity to have a voice, and to be heard. The allure of this opportunity stems from the sensation of deviation which accompanies performance. Furthermore, in the context of the poem, spoken word provides an opportunity to deviate from conventional production and receipt of poetry on the page, and the attendant associations which circumscribe publishing as an industry which is controlled, regulated and which to the general populace carries an implication of profound exclusivity. In this respect, occupation of performance poetry spaces attends quite clearly to the vein of thought Todd May traces throughout Foucault's work. Be it a reanimation of human experience through phenomenological enquiry or the kind of resistance to categorical reductionism typifying later Foucauldian thought, performance poetry fulfils the promise of a poetic mode which deviates, and which challenges formal or social category expectations.

⁶³⁰ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p.25.

The second principle Foucault identifies relates to the distinction between site and function previously established and interrogated:

a society, as its history unfolds, can make an existing heterotopia function in a very different fashion; for each heterotopia has a precise and determined function within a society and the same heterotopia can, according to the synchrony of the culture in which it occurs, have one function or another.⁶³¹

Foucault's extended discussion of the cemetery is helpful to see the transformations of function, but to continue an analysis of the common sites of performance poetry; sites of relaxation determined by set relations, this principle can be applied to the spaces which performance poetry transforms. When the café or the pub becomes a site of performance the performance space exercises its capacity as a heterotopia. Through spoken word what exists as a gathering place circumscribed by socialization through shared utilization of space and, in most cases, product, accepts into its heart the spectacle of the performance. As this occurs an increasing recognition of shared affective experiences restructures the space as one fulfilling an entirely different function. Performance poetry formulates a new purpose for the space which is that of a site for shared spectatorship – the space for a show. As articulated in my previous analysis, the context and the affective tone of the performance itself can then continue a process of re-purposing the space, a liminal and transformative process which is not determined, and which creates further experiential potential. This kind of experiential potential (the

⁶³¹ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p.25.

capacity for re-purposing a space) stimulates different phenomenological experiences and encounters, highlighting the pedagogical potential of the performance poetry space. Through performance poetry's ability to generate alternative phenomenological experiences of a space, the occupants are able to grasp new potentials in the subsequent re-engagements of phenomenological experience.

This phenomenological potential relates to Foucault's third principle of heterotopias, which establishes that: 'The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible'.⁶³² In this respect, heterotopias can be explicitly applied to criticism of performances spaces. In theatre criticism the representative juxtaposition of several spaces, what Foucault refers to as the simultaneous representation, contestation, and inversion of real sites found within a culture is apparent in the manifest fluidity of the theatrical stage. This transformation of space gestures towards the mutable nature of the heterotopia; a reconciliation of irreconcilable spatial transgression. While this may be clearly evidenced in the imaginative transformations of the theatrical stage from one illusory vista to another through the unfolding of a shifting narrative, I contend that it is also evident in performance poetry spaces. Spoken word delineates a social transformation whereby the movement and transmission of affect transforms the physical and emotional tenor of a shared social space. What is established thus is the progressive manifestation of a unique space between the stage (performer) and the audience which may

⁶³² Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p.25.

undergo a number of incompatible spatial transformations through the same mechanism that the theatrical stage employs to encourage the imagination to invoke juxtaposing scenes.

The fourth principle Foucault outlines relates to the bisection of space and time within the site of the heterotopia which contributes to the unique sense of the heterotopia as a space outside of the regulated structure of the utopia. It also serves to underpin the notion that despite Foucault's designation of the 'epoch of space' in relation to a re-situation of critical attention to time, the passage of time is still of course fundamental to how one interprets the utilization of space:

Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time-which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies. The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time.⁶³³

This concept of heterochronies can be delineated along lines of the indefinite accumulation of time, which Foucault evidences in the heterotopia of the museum or the library. These heterotopias remain functional as fluid sites of representation, contestation, and inversion due to the constant accumulation of material. This distinction is, for Foucault, a particularity of the modern condition:

the idea of accumulating everything, of establishing a sort of general archive, the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms,

⁶³³ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p.26.

all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages, the project of organizing in this way a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place, this whole idea belongs to our modernity. The museum and the library are heterotopias that are proper to western culture of the nineteenth century.⁶³⁴

However, Foucault also gestures towards alternative heterochronies which are focused not towards infinite accumulation but to the constant passage of time:

Opposite these heterotopias that are linked to the accumulation of time, there are those linked, on the contrary, to time in its most fleeting, transitory, precarious aspect, to time in the mode of the festival. These heterotopias are not oriented toward the eternal, they are rather absolutely temporal.⁶³⁵

In the above quote Foucault refers explicitly to the notion of the festival, a concept which has profound implications for spatial criticism and the spatial turn. It is also profoundly important for the relationship between performance poetry and the phenomenological experience of the performance space. I contend that the heterochronies of the festival relate in particular to the heterotopia of the performance poetry space. This is due to the fundamentality of the passage of time to the processes which form the production and presentation of verbal art. Despite contestation that the poem may be a mark in time (relating to the processes by

⁶³⁴ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p.26.

⁶³⁵ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p.26.

which certain heterochronies enact the record of an accumulating infinity) the performance space relates more definitively to the notion of a fleeting moment of transition within a space. The content of the poem may never waiver but each performance will be unique, a result largely conditioned by the phenomenological experience of the space within which the poem is performed, and the affect generated within that space. The fluidity of this and the abjuration of a fixed form of the performance poem draws attention to the transience inherent to the spoken word event. This transience is reflected in the centrality of time as a guiding factor for utilizing the heterotopia, where performances are often delimited by constraints on time. Additionally, time is a distinct focus for many contemporary performance poets – whether it be a re-representation of past temporal periods or a contemplation of the poet’s identity in the present in relation to past and future iterations.⁶³⁶ Within the heterotopia of the performance space, time is established as an unequivocal factor in the mechanism of the event. It serves to condition an audience to reconceive their notions of their own traditional, everyday temporal experiencing by forcing upon them the complex dialogue between the distinct and concrete existence of the poem. It also invites consideration of the fluidity of the token of the particular performance they are receiving. This further reinforces the performance space as a heterotopia of contestation and juxtaposition, and in doing so, contributes to the pedagogical implication of the experience by facilitating a coming to terms with one’s own everyday temporality.

⁶³⁶ For examples, see: Neil Astley (ed.), *In Person: 30 Poets* (Tartet: Bloodaxe Books, 2008).

Foucault's fifth principle explores the accessibility of the heterotopia as an element within a society conditioned by admission, rite, and public space, and the complications of potential exclusions to the heterotopic site:

Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable. In general, the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place. Either the entry is compulsory, as in the case of entering a barracks or a prison, or else the individual has to submit to rites and purifications. To get in one must have a certain permission and make certain gestures... There are others, on the contrary, that seem to be pure and simple openings, but that generally hide curious exclusions. Everyone can enter into these heterotopic sites, but in fact that is only an illusion: we think we enter where we are, by the very fact that we enter, excluded.⁶³⁷

As a statement regarding the contemporary performance poetry scene this description seems to find comfortable purchase. Although institutions of performance poetry may present a democratic site of the body and the voice, the cultural connotations of the poetry reading, and the cultural capital of poetry remains both bound to and contained within it. Within the framework of an application of Foucault's heterotopology to the performance space the simultaneity of both isolation and penetrability may thus be difficult to reconcile with an argument espousing performance poetry as a new, positive, accessible medium for receiving poetry. However, the performance stage is itself a space within the

⁶³⁷ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p.26.

heterotopia conditioned by the performance – and the interactions between these two spaces are I contend, more representative of the dialectic Foucault poses.

Potential spectators may feel consternation at the exclusions presented by the idea of the spoken word event, but it is ultimately not the accessibility of the site which is problematized. The site, as explored in the analysis of Foucault's second principle, commonly serves an alternative function – a space for relaxation or recreation.

Access to this space is not contested until the interposition of the stage, which transforms the space into a site for spectatorship. It is not the idea of becoming a member of a collective body of spectators, but the notion of the performance poetry stage which creates a relationship of inclusion and exclusion by representing practice and ritual which may be unfamiliar. Though this recognizes the potential problems of performance poetry as a popular medium, it does not assert against the notion of the space as a heterotopia. On the contrary it accedes to implications of the importance of the performance poetry stage within a social structure – a space which, while circumscribed by potential rites and exclusions is vital to ensure that the hosting site is transformed from its normal function. When repurposed by performance the site becomes a space for significant and valuable discourse regarding the society it is placed within.

The potential of this discourse in turn relates critically to Foucault's last principle of heterotopology. Foucault's sixth principle offers a representation of the function of the heterotopia itself:

The last trait of heterotopias is that they have a function in relation to all the space that remains. This function unfolds between two extreme

poles. Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory... Or else, on the contrary, their role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled. This latter type would be the heterotopia, not of illusion, but of compensation.⁶³⁸

One may argue that sites of performance poetry have potential to offer both. This of course depends on the focus point of the analysis. A heterotopic space of illusion might be established by the relationship between the audience and the performer. In this sense, the heterotopia focuses around the concept of the performance poet as a radicalized speaker, and the act of listening to the performance radicalizes itself against the everyday activities of the audience members. Here the performance poetry space becomes a site for contemplation and, ultimately, reconsideration of values that form out of engagement with utopic spaces which, as illusions, do not provoke or condition introspection. The function of this exposure reconditions the audience to re-evaluation, reflecting the process by which the heterotopia forms, becoming a site attenuated to deviance from the norm established in the everyday. The contrary position which Foucault articulates is a heterotopic space of compensation. This relies upon a focus point fixed between the spectators forming the audience. In this case the heterotopic space created is the space enacted by the spectators in response to the stage and to the performer. The affect which transforms this space is a unified affect established by an audience

⁶³⁸ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p.27.

of individuals responding as a shared body. The space that is created is real, albeit transient, and reflects an antithesis to the isolation impelled by utopic spaces, the very nature of which prevent the unification of shared affect via the regulative measures which fix relationships with and within these spaces. The oppositions which Foucault invokes in the introduction to his essay; oppositions: 'that remain inviolable, that our institutions and practices have not yet dared to break down'⁶³⁹ are, perhaps, the challenge against which such compensatory spaces are set. In this instance the heterotopia of the performance poetry space serves not as an invasive re-evaluator of social and societal norms, but an affirmation of the potential of shared affect within society. This poses the performance poetry space as an apt space for education through a pedagogy of diverse experiences rather than a dogmatic re-inscription of fixed social values.

Regardless of the specification of function, within the context of performance spaces the elaboration of sites of performance as heterotopias is a useful designation of spaces which can be occupied and utilized to challenge conventional understanding of society and social space. This extends to both a study of the contemporary space, and the development of the social role of the theatre space throughout its history. Heterotopias are sites which enable potential change through the reconsideration of social structures facilitated by the use of spaces such as the performance poetry space, a site which encourages discourse and community. As the theatre critic Patrick Primavesi articulates in his article 'Heterotopias of the Public Sphere: Theatre and Festival around 1800':

⁶³⁹ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p.23.

Unlike the utopias of an ideal and perfect world, which is delegated, one might say, to illusory spaces, heterotopias are real places that question the rules governing hierarchical emplacements. Whereas utopias have a stabilizing effect, heterotopias are always a potential disruption to symbolic order.⁶⁴⁰

The transformations of space enacted by the shared relationship between audiences members and the relationship between audience and performer can be evidenced in the utilization and development of new spaces in traditional theatrical performances: ‘the creation of theatrical situations between performers and spectators is possible anywhere – recent work with forms of theatre that takes place outside of established theatre spaces has often confirmed this’.⁶⁴¹ The heterotopia extends beyond Foucault’s initial proposition of counter-site, bisecting and reconstituting the realms of theatre and performance:

The term ‘heterotopia’ can be further thought of in relation to the theatre, whose heterotopian effects are not limited to a represented juxtaposition of disparate spaces, but cover the entirety of its spatial layout – according to the changing relationship between stage and auditorium, which has become progressively more open.⁶⁴²

Spatial occupation enacted by contemporary spoken word is not delimited by preconceived performance spaces; rather, as Laurie Bolger attests, the contemporary performance poetry scene in the UK in particular occupies and

⁶⁴⁰ Primavesi, p.167.

⁶⁴¹ Primavesi, p.168.

⁶⁴² Primavesi, p.168.

utilizes spaces that are either otherwise designated or present as social spaces. In both cases application of a heterotopic analysis is appropriate.

Nineteenth-century theatre spaces

It is of course important to acknowledge that such capacity to utilize space in contemporary performance owes a great debt to the development of traditional theatre. Interrogating theatre in the early nineteenth century, Julie A. Carson, in her essay 'Hazlitt and the sociability of theatre' suggests that 'By design theatre is a social space that assembles disparate people for entertainment and cultural enlightenment, achieving in the process some semblance of group coherence'.⁶⁴³ In the process of her analysis of William Hazlitt's critique of the English theatre⁶⁴⁴, Carson articulates a relationship between the theatre and sociability in Romantic, post-Enlightenment England:

What emerges for Hazlitt's writings is the weight that arguments for the sociability of theatre assume in post-revolutionary England – how this weight shapes Romantic conceptions of theatrical representation and of theatre's function in broadening social and political representation.

⁶⁴³ Julie A. Carson, 'Hazlitt and the sociability of theatre', in *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain 1770-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.145-166 (pp.160-161).

⁶⁴⁴ For more information, see: William Hazlitt, *A View Of The English Stage* (London: Robert Stodart, 1818). Additionally, a more generalized impression of Hazlitt's view of the early nineteenth century can be found in: William Hazlitt, *Lectures On English Poets & The Spirit Of The Age* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1910).

What also becomes clear is that theatre's liminality is social, not simply aesthetic, that theatre is suspended between private and public dynamics of both cultural and individual identity. Coordinating these features accounts for many of the tensions evident in Romantic approaches to theatre. Perhaps more to the point, varying approaches to theatre reveal warring conceptions of human identity.⁶⁴⁵

Carson's argument suggests that problematic preference for theatre which worked 'to maintain the individuality and interiority of identity'⁶⁴⁶ resisted the demands of the theatre to facilitate social engagement: 'More to the point, theatre strengthens by exercising memory more than do other aesthetic arenas and in doing so extends if not actual lifespans then certainly the depth and intensity of human life'.⁶⁴⁷

The 'depth and intensity of human life' Carson remarks upon correlates with my argument regarding the pedagogical value of performance in relation to affect. Certainly Hazlitt himself believed strongly in such social value, as attested in his collected essays: 'we feel a sort of theoretical as well as instinctive predilection for the faces of play-going people, as among the most sociable, gossiping, good-natured, and humane members of society'.⁶⁴⁸ What is more, in the essay in question; 'On play-going and on some of our old actors' Hazlitt offers the notion

⁶⁴⁵ Carson, p.161.

⁶⁴⁶ Carson, p.161.

⁶⁴⁷ Carson, p.163.

⁶⁴⁸ William Hazlitt, *Hazlitt on Theatre*, ed. by William Archer and Robert Lowe (London: Walter Scott Ltd., 1895), p.142.

that: 'the stage is a test and school of humanity'.⁶⁴⁹ The dual identity as test and school reaffirms the pedagogical value of performance, then as now.

Further to this the phenomenology of the theatre, and of performance in general, acutely reinforces my larger argument: the pedagogical potential of performance poetry through a widening of experience within the performance space. In order to elucidate this connection, and to support my subsequent analysis of theatre as heterotopia I refer to Daniel Johnson's essay 'Phenomenology, Time and Performance'. The essay, delivered as a lecture at Monash University's 2009 *time.transcendence.performance* conference, argues that 'theatre can be seen as a practical form of phenomenology—an investigation of Being.'⁶⁵⁰ As clarification, and also recognition that the argument may be extended across performance practice in general, Johnson states that:

By referring to 'theatre' here, I mean the dynamic process of meaning-making and 'the whole performance process' rather than simply the interpretation of a pre-given meaning in a dramatic text. Of course it should be noted that theatre-making is certainly a collaborative effort not in the least including the active interpretation and presence of the spectator too. My contention is that at least some theories of theatre have a deeply phenomenological concern by attending to 'the manner in which things appear' because they are based in and reflective upon concrete practices of lived experience. In other words, an emphasis on

⁶⁴⁹ Archer, p,142.

⁶⁵⁰ Daniel Johnson, 'Phenomenology, Time and Performance', *Monash University Web* (September 2012) <<http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/performance/files/2012/09/proceedings-johnston-phenomenology-time-performance-ttp-conference.pdf>> [accessed January 2016], pp.1-12 (p.1).

practical experience and process in theatre guides both spectators and performers to an appreciation of the nature of Being.⁶⁵¹

Johnson evokes a similar argument to Rancière's *The Emancipated Spectator* and by doing so opens the discourse for an affect-led exploration of our phenomenological experience of the theatre. Similar to Gay McAuley's definition of the performance event⁶⁵² Johnson situates the body at the centre of the experience: 'Actors can express ideas in space in an embodied way, within a specific duration from a certain point in history. This may well be true of other art forms, of course, but in the case of acting, the actor's own body is the material signifier itself'.⁶⁵³ Johnson's arguments also establish a clear connection to the spatio-temporal engagements which are characterized by Foucault's fourth principle of heterotopia. As Johnson states: 'In the liminal or liminoid, ludic space and time, participants both lose themselves in 'flow' and have a stronger sense of self-awareness and temporality; they both lose sense of time and experience time—more than in everyday life'.⁶⁵⁴ In this last observation Johnson brings the experience of the everyday under examination, drawing together various different elements of the analysis of performance poetry under a phenomenological enquiry: 'Because performance is a process rather than an object it highlights the importance of the situated-ness of the human subject in its engagement with its surroundings, or in phenomenological

⁶⁵¹ Johnson, p.1.

⁶⁵² Defined as: 'what takes place between performers and spectators in a given space and time' (McAuley, p.235).

⁶⁵³ Johnson, p.1.

⁶⁵⁴ Johnson, p.2.

terms, In-der-Welt-sein⁶⁵⁵ (Being-in-the-World)'.⁶⁵⁶ The investigation of performance through a phenomenological lens has pedagogical merit by virtue of its tacit reinforcement of practical applications:

I suggest that we might not only investigate the question 'what is Being?' in abstract philosophical phenomenology, but also in a practical way through performance. In a way, such a view of theatre is less transcendental philosophy than it is drawing attention to aspects of Being through concrete practice.⁶⁵⁷

This practical application is of course predicated upon an analysis of the socio-spatial contexts which enable contemporary performance spaces (and their subsequent pedagogical implications). I contend that it is central to my argument that the space for contemporary spoken word be acknowledged alongside an understanding of the significance of developments in theatre during the nineteenth century. The opening of the theatrical space during the 1800s is critical to understanding the space (within a framework of contemporary poetics) which has opened to allow performance to re-emerge as a medium for receiving poetry. In her essay 'Before the curtain' from *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre* Nina Auerbach insist upon "the centrality of the theatre in nineteenth century culture; until the end of the century, its broad popularity gave

⁶⁵⁵ 'In-der-Welt-sein' (Being-in-the-World) is a term coined by Martin Heidegger to explain his concept of 'dasein' or 'being there', from: Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1978).

⁶⁵⁶ Johnson, p.3.

⁶⁵⁷ Johnson, p.3.

its conventions the aura of universality'.⁶⁵⁸ Concentrated academic study of theatre in the period developed slowly, in their introduction to *Essays on Nineteenth Century British Theatre* published in 1971 the editors Kenneth Richards and Peter Thompson noted that 'It is still fairly respectable to know nothing about the nineteenth century theatre, but it seems unlikely that it will be so for long'.⁶⁵⁹ Richards and Thompson present a common perception of the modest literary quality of the output during the period⁶⁶⁰, but further to their initial assessment they note that:

as we become more aware of the need to see plays not only in their literary, but also in their social and theatrical contexts, and as we increasingly perceive that the roots of much modern drama are to be found in the experiments and extravagances of the nineteenth century stage, it is certain that the disparagement of the period cannot last.⁶⁶¹

It is for this reason that I contend the relevance of analysing the theatre of this period. The movement towards a consciousness of social (and spatial) contexts of performance precisely anticipates the emergence of a valuable medium in contemporary performance poetry. A connection also clearly emerges when considered alongside my earlier analysis of performance poetry's value within the

⁶⁵⁸ Nina Auerbach, 'Before the curtain', in *Introduction to The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre*, ed. by Kerry Powell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2004), pp.3-17 (p.4)

⁶⁵⁹ Richards, Kenneth, and Peter Thompson (eds.), 'Introduction', in *Essays on Nineteenth Century British Theatre* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd: 1971), pp.i-vii (p.vii).

⁶⁶⁰ In her overview of academic opinions regarding nineteenth century theatre the critic Jacky Bratton presents (and subsequently subverts): 'the received teleological assumption that this period was the nadir or theatrical life, the starting point of a long struggle from darkness into light'. Jacky Bratton, *New Readings in Theatre History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.36.

⁶⁶¹ Richards, *Essays on Nineteenth Century British Theatre*, p.vii.

academy. In the same period in which the critic Matthew Arnold was impelling a legacy of academic exclusivism in the apprehension of poetry as: 'the best which has been thought and said in the world'⁶⁶² the theatre of the time suffered a similar legacy of disparagement. The neglect of nineteenth century theatre studies is analogous to the absence of a contemporary academic focus on performance poetry. For Arnold, art existed as a kind of moral medicine⁶⁶³ situated in the context of his own anxiety over the pervasive threat that the sciences posed, as well as fears regarding the erosion of culture. Under a similar lens, academic disregard of nineteenth century theatre reflects hierarchies of value, erasing traditions of social, public performance. Contemporary assessment of the period suggests that it was in fact a time when theatre space was being opened up to public engagement in a way hitherto unknown or unacknowledged.⁶⁶⁴ The focal point of this engagement is encapsulated by the development of public spaces for performance, and is intimately connected to the Theatres Act in 1843 which gave powers to local authorities to license theatres, subsequently giving rise to the development of social spaces such as the public house and the music hall. Although subscribing to a slightly more complex impression of factors which precipitated the commencement of the Act the critic Clive Barker argues that its impact renegotiated the use of social spaces for public performance:

⁶⁶² Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, p.5.

⁶⁶³ This is discussed in more detail in: Nagendra Prasad, *Personal Bias in Literary Criticism* (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2002), p.100.

⁶⁶⁴ For further information, see: Peter Raby, 'Theatre of the 1890s: breaking down the barriers', in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre*. ed. by Kerry Powell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp.183-207.

The public house being the centre for many of political and social life; it was often the cultural hub also. Many public houses had free and easy singing, and in some of these houses the processes that has called the Minor Theatres into being during the rise of middle-class consciousness gave rise to a demand for working-class theatre. It also gave rise to a further number of Minor Theatres in the fringe of the city which grew out of pleasure gardens.⁶⁶⁵

In the course of his analysis Barker notes the limits of his inquiry: 'I have not of course mentioned anything about the penny theatres and 'dukeries', which are one stratum of popular theatre below the saloons. This area can be neglected very little longer'.⁶⁶⁶ The limits are nonetheless suggestive of a direction of investigation; one which vectors towards an elucidation of the increasing role social spaces such as public houses played in hosting performance events. It is also important to note the role that Barker ascribes to Chartism in the reconstitution of performance spaces. Chartism; an early 1800s working-class movement seeking political reform⁶⁶⁷ took its name from the People's Charter of 1838. The movement was responsible for a number of petitions and protests aimed at redressing social, and class imbalance. It was also responsible for a significant cultural contribution considering it was relatively short lived (1838-1858).⁶⁶⁸ Indeed, as the critic Mike Sanders writes in *The*

⁶⁶⁵ Clive Barker, 'A Theatre for the People', in *Essays on Nineteenth Century British Theatre*, ed. by Kenneth Richards and Peter Thompson (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1971), pp.3-25 (p.20). Barker also suggests that the Act itself was a sop intended to acknowledge the passing of the monopoly of Patent Houses; theatres licensed to perform spoken drama: 'the Act simply tied up the loose ends and took some of the ambiguities out of the law' (Barker, p.9).

⁶⁶⁶ Barker, p.22.

⁶⁶⁷ See: Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: A New History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

⁶⁶⁸ The significance of Chartism during the mid-nineteenth century is further discussed in: Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists: Popular Politics in the Industrial Revolution* (New York: Pantheon, 1984).

Poetry of Chartism: Aesthetics, Politics, History (2009), 'poetry played an active, primary role within the movement... the result of the realisation that for the Chartist movement, the political and the aesthetic are not just closely related concepts but are thoroughly imbricated practices'.⁶⁶⁹ A number of prominent critical studies of poetry of the nineteenth century have focused on the importance of the political and social aspects of lyric and verse, a particularly salient example being the critic Anne Janowitz. Janowitz's 1998 text *Lyric and Labour in the Romantic Tradition* opens by interrogating the dichotomy of the British Romantic poet as an isolated body and a socially orientated poetic radical.⁶⁷⁰ I suggest that this dichotomy operates similarly in the context of the performance poet. Indeed, this description of Chartist negotiation of both the political and the aesthetic could easily be levied in support of spoken word⁶⁷¹ and I contend further comparisons, particularly the notion that Chartism enabled a 'poetry for the people', accessible by the people rather than a minority of elected voices. To take this comparison even further, Sanders articulates a dislocation between traditional theatrical 'logos' (appeal to reason) and the more striking rhetoric of performative 'pathos' (appeal to feeling) which hallmarked the radical social performances of Chartist aesthetics: 'the radical playbill has a strong sense of the carnivalesque, of the radical debunking and overturning of the status quo through the use of satire, and hence

⁶⁶⁹ Mike Sanders, *The Poetry of Chartism: Aesthetics, Politics, History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.3.

⁶⁷⁰ In particular, see chapter one: 'The communitarian lyric in the dialect of romanticism' (pp.11-32) Anne Janowitz, *Lyric and Labour in the Romantic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁶⁷¹ For a clearer comparison see: Maria Damon, 'Was that "Different," "Dissident," or "Dissonant"? Poetry (n) the Public Space: Slams, Open Readings, and Dissident Traditions.', in *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*, ed. by Charles Bernstein (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp.324-342.

has a much heavier reliance on an affective and emotional response'.⁶⁷² Particularly in light of my investigation of performance poetry's affective potential I believe that this is consonant with descriptions of contemporary performance poetry I have articulated over the course of my analysis of spoken word and the academy.⁶⁷³ Barker's description of Chartist involvement in the negotiation of new spaces for theatre in the 1800s continues this description, suggesting that a lot of the material performed in these theatre spaces was politically charged: 'several of the Chartist leaders were playwrights'.⁶⁷⁴ He also notes that several sites of Chartist activity such as Blackfriars Rotunda also functioned as theatre and performance spaces.⁶⁷⁵

Whether or not one ascribes to the belief that the Chartist movement in particular incited shifts in the utilization of social spaces, the existence of these shifts is undoubtable. As Jacky Bratton discusses in her essay 'The music hall', the early 1800s was a time of enormous expansion for the performance spaces: 'During this period huge success attended the transformation of a multitude of small-scale entertainments presided over by pub proprietors and semi-professional

⁶⁷² Mike Sanders, 'The platform and the stage: the primary aesthetics of Chartism', in *Politics, performance and popular culture: Theatre and society in nineteenth-century Britain*, ed. by Peter Yeandle, Katherine Newey, Jeffrey Richards (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), pp.44-59 (p.48).

⁶⁷³ Furthermore, Sanders makes explicit the lack of critical attention paid to Chartist poets (both contemporary and of the period): 'Most existing scholarship on Chartist poetry has tended to concentrate on the handful of 'Labour Laureates' (Cooper, Jones, Massey) and on poetry of an obvious and immediate political nature. In short, it has operated with what might be described as a 'self-evident' definition of its object of study, constructing Chartist poetry as an 'ideal type' consisting of poems on a recognisably Chartist theme written by self-identified Chartist poets. However, this ignores the atypicality of the Labour Laureates. The overwhelming majority of Chartist poets did not achieve widespread recognition in their lifetimes, nor did they publish volumes of their work. Instead, the typical Chartist poet enjoyed a limited, local reputation and published their work in the periodical press' (Sanders, *The Poetry of Chartism*, p.66).

⁶⁷⁴ Barker, p.20.

⁶⁷⁵ Barker, pp.20-24.

chairmen'.⁶⁷⁶ Bratton's reading of the 1843 Theatres Act casts darker aspersions on its intended contribution to the cultural landscape of the 1800s. She suggests that rather than facilitating a wider platform for engagement with the arts (accommodating a host of smaller, and more diverse venues) the Act was intended to establish a value binary between high and low art:

In an attempt to repel the encroachment of low entertainment... and so 'restore' the privileged position of the written play over all other performance forms... The 1843 Act intended to abstract the serious play from its place within the matrix of entertainment, free it from pollution and defend it from competition, and render it answerable to a modern, respectable idea of Art. The rest was rejected, and left to be simply policed by the magistracy, through music and dancing licensing.⁶⁷⁷

Sightings of institutionalized value-binaries between high and low art brings analysis of the period back in line with my interpretation of the absence of performance poetics in contemporary academic study. Although the 1800s may have established changes in the way that public space is utilized for performance it does not address the fact that performance poetry, despite the pedagogical potential I have outlined, did not manifest into an academic discipline or an accepted medium of transmission and reception. Bratton remarks in her longer investigation *New Readings in Theatre History* (2003), that 'In this study I want to consider the discourse that crystallised the binary division between art and

⁶⁷⁶ Jacky Bratton, 'The music hall', in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre*, ed. by Kerry Powell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp.164-183 (p.164).

⁶⁷⁷ Bratton, 'The music hall', p.166.

entertainment, considering how the reforms of the 1830s used the notion of inferior, popular performance in their vision of the theatrical world'.⁶⁷⁸ Bratton concludes by highlighting the incongruity of establishing an opening for radicalized, socially engaged theatre in public spaces, only for it to be suppressed by fears of 'lower' forms of popularized entertainment.⁶⁷⁹ Though she also cites investment and marketization of the lucrative small theatre scene in the later 1800s as factors contributing to their decline⁶⁸⁰ I believe a focus on the disparagement of the perceived value of the performances to be more appropriate to my investigation and to the context of contemporary performance poetry. In order to fully assess this disparagement, and to explicate how, in a spatial context, deleterious impressions of the cultural value of performance poetics relate to utilization of social spaces, I return to Patrick Primavesi's discussion of Foucauldian heterotopias in the 1800s.

⁶⁷⁸ Bratton, *New Readings*, p.133.

⁶⁷⁹ Bratton posits: 'I suggest, at the end of this study, what is lost to theatre history and indeed to the development of English drama by the strict segregation between that vigorous theatrical lifespring and nineteenth-century Drama' (Bratton, *New Readings*, p.133).

⁶⁸⁰ This marketization is further discussed in Bratton's essay 'The music hall': 'Cultural change and aspiration, the broadening of the audience to include more segments of later-Victorian society, and concomitant moves to increase discipline and market control shifted power into the hands of business managers and investors... The transformation resulted not only in the shifting character of the large halls themselves, as they developed into 'variety theatres', but also the suppression of small independent halls; it eventually deracinated an institution which then failed to meet the challenge of further developments in the leisure industries' (Bratton, 'The music hall', p.164).

Traditional theatre and contemporary performance spaces

By addressing the role of heterotopias across critiques of nineteenth century theatre spaces, Primavesi's study of Foucault in relation to the theatre raises certain important questions. Chief among these questions is the development of a contention between traditional representations of theatre and new engagements with the theatre as a site for radical social performance and development.⁶⁸¹ Alongside the widening of performance spaces articulated by critics such as Bratton and Barker, Primavesi situates the original pivot for re-engagement in the development of a new public sphere as a response to the Enlightenment:

The critique and replacement of inherited forms of representation, promoted by the philosophical and aesthetic redefinition of community and the public sphere constituted a central element of the Enlightenment project. The theatre, in particular, was held up as a school of ethics and morality, something which, in practice, it was both unable and unwilling to be.⁶⁸²

Of particular note, Primavesi invites interpretation of public theatre as 'an autonomous festival of responsible citizens, set in opposition to courtly

⁶⁸¹ For an enlightening analysis of these trends of social performance see: John Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community 1762-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), which presents the emerging importance of sociability in reading and writing practice during the period 1762-1830: 'If definitions of the field of literary production in terms of visionary genius or professional specialism grew apace and gathered cultural authority, they did not simply erase the understanding or practices of reading and writing as taking place within and between variously situated conversable worlds' (Mee, p.33).

⁶⁸² Primavesi, p.169.

representation... thereby conceiving theatre anew'.⁶⁸³ The festival, and the transgression of a hegemonic understanding of performance spaces, is key to understanding the contemporary status of performance poetry. The festival presents a site where autonomy (between performer and spectator) is recognized as mutually contributing to the performance; much like affect transmission presents a collaborative engagement. Not only does this critical analysis of space reconcile the adoption of public spaces in contemporary spoken word performances, but also the manner by which performers of spoken word enact representations of themselves. Primavesi argues that in the context of the festival enacted by the public theatre of nineteenth century heterotopic spaces such as the music hall or the pub, legitimated representation of the self were crucial to the maintenance of the public sphere: 'representative self-portrayal is also a prerequisite to the idea of a democratically constituted public sphere'.⁶⁸⁴ In this delineation, traditional concepts of the performance stage were rendered inflexible, utopic, bound spaces, whereas the renegotiation of performance spaces (transgressive, representative, heterotopic spaces) were elevated to spaces of dynamic social engagement, where the self could be freely represented. This representation was enabled through the collective understanding that such self-engagement was effected against a backdrop of performativity, and that the single voice was participating within rather than designating or delimiting the heterotopic festival space as one fulfilling a set function.

⁶⁸³ Primavesi, p.169.

⁶⁸⁴ Primavesi, p.169.

In reality however, as evidenced by critical detachment from theatre in the period, nineteenth century idealization of the public sphere and the transgression of theatrical stage to social space did not achieve a unified community. Theatre failed to deliver the democratic social space demanded by the representative public sphere. As Primavesi argues:

At the same time, however, it prompted a resurgence of old anti-theatrical prejudices contained in new moral concerns. Theatre fervour and 'theatromania' were deemed harmful excesses of affect and fantasy, an escape from reality and a sign of moral decay. The fundamental ambivalence of the bourgeoisie's attitude toward the theatre was finally expressed in the attempt to discipline the behaviour of performers and spectators, and to channel the desire to transgress everyday conventions. The establishment of bourgeois theatre, determined by this program of discipline and self-control, already demonstrated the tension between utopia and heterotopia that has shaped theatre discourse ever since.⁶⁸⁵

The development of bourgeois theatre (against the notions of a theatre serving a democratically constituted public sphere) was undermined by the problematizing elements represented in the threat of excess through theatrical performance; the 'lower' forms of entertainment. Bourgeois theatre intended a critical public appraisal; a forum space for discourse. However, pressure evoked by a deep desire to react against theatrical traditions prompted an element of control over the

⁶⁸⁵ Primavesi, p.170.

transgressions appropriated within the public space which only proved counter-productive. Ironically this forum of spectatorship, fearing its own fragility, struggled to disassociate itself from the sort of rituality observed in theatre, or to provide adequate freedoms implicit within the ideals of festive transgression.

However, for bourgeois theatre, thrown out with 'theatromania' the notion of affect as a principle of the social, and of transgression from routine, became synonymous not with liberation but with excess. Subsequently, the public space of the theatre came to be depicted as 'an ambivalent object of fascination, to which the crises of bourgeois existence were linked as much as the expectation of a life fulfilled by the glamour of public recognition. Theatre events of this period exhibited the paradoxical features of a festival that reflects and questions itself'.⁶⁸⁶ Focus on the failure of bourgeois theatre to radically employ the notion of heterotopias implicit within the festival has value to a study of contemporary performance poetry because it represented a direct challenge to the liberating function of the communal social space. This communality is the exact element of shared affect negotiation which contemporary performance poetry seeks to reengage with. Just as the bourgeois theatre began to circumscribe the festival, so does the relative abjuration of spaces which might have supported a true place for performance in the canon of poetics mimic this moment of renunciation critically. The festival, akin to the performance space, entitled community engagement at a transformative level:

⁶⁸⁶ Primavesi, pp.171-172.

Festivals are heterotopias, not only because they require ephemeral spaces, as described by Foucault, but, more generally, as events based in a collective staging. As such, festivals include a potential for communality and excess, precisely those elements that bourgeois theatre had sought to eliminate in order to establish a critical discourse opposed to courtly theatre culture. But a theatre that wished to renounce all moments of festivity was in danger of ossifying in its function.⁶⁸⁷

The paradox which contained bourgeois theatre also prevented it from embracing the festival, establishing a boundary between theatre as a site of discourse and the excesses of the festival which, when logically pursued, becomes a familiar distinction between high and low art. As Primavesi writes: 'literary theatre moved along the very border marked by the curtain- as a heterotopia oscillating between an exclusive claim to higher education and a culture of popular entertainment'.⁶⁸⁸ Rather than embracing the pedagogical potential of a shared affective experience, bourgeois theatre distanced itself from overabundance.

When one considers the festival as heterotopia evoking a rich tradition of communal reflection and evaluation of the everyday, the notion that it should have been decoupled from the late 1800s reassessment of ethics and morality in the public sphere seems untenable.⁶⁸⁹ No less incompatible may be the idea that in

⁶⁸⁷ Primavesi, p.175.

⁶⁸⁸ Primavesi, p.175.

⁶⁸⁹ Indeed, in their essay 'Victorian and Edwardian audiences' (Jim Davis and Victor Emeljanow, 'Victorian and Edwardian audiences', in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre*. ed. Kerry Powell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) pp. 93-109) the authors offer the following: 'The orthodox history of English theatre audiences from 1843 to 1910 is often

contemporary poetics the practice and production of powerfully affective material is separated from the actual affective experience, or that the receipt should not be a shared experience. Underscoring the heterotopia of the festival as a site of excess enables and legitimizes the critical distance levied against performance poetry by categorizing excess as the anticipation of indecorous fantasy and moral decay. The implication commits the relationship between the festival and the theatre to a value distinction, one which operates antithetically to the notion of heterotopia, or the representation of a variegated and non-exclusive space of transformation. As I have argued, the contemporary non-designation of performance poetry within the academy finds both precedence and reinforcement in the unsuccessful attempts to radicalize public performance spaces during the nineteenth century. The festival, a heterotopic site of idealized communal and social discourse, becomes entangled with the diminution of 'lower' cultural exploits. Although twentieth-century conceptions of the theatre and its function in society underwent radical changes I contend that contemporary resistances to cultures of spoken word in the reception of poetry are evidence of a stigma which has not been similarly expiated, thus ensuring that spoken word retains a status as entertainment rather than a valuable pedagogical medium for receiving poetry.

presented as an evolutionary and triumphalist narrative. Theatrical reform, improved conditions within the auditorium and the re-emergence of a respectable upper- and middle-class audience, attracted back after the absorption of disreputable and unruly elements by the music hall, apparently paved the way for a theatre and a drama that could once again be taken seriously. Yet the evidence militates against so simplistic a narrative' (Davis, p.94). However, they also admit that in line with later critical disengagement from nineteenth century theatre as discussed, the notion of a more communal audience did not in fact survive the period: 'we can only be sure of one factor: that it continued to maintain the range and diversity, noted throughout this chapter, right up until the end of our period' (Davis, p.107).

To contextualize such resistances a speculative comparison between contemporary performance poetry and contemporary theatre requires further examination of the spaces and spatial practices that comprise both.⁶⁹⁰ Returning to Primavesi's gambit regarding the idealized social space of contemporary theatre ('the creation of theatrical situations between performers and spectators is possible anywhere – recent work with forms of theatre that takes place outside of established theatre spaces has often confirmed this'⁶⁹¹) one may readily assume a connection between the theatre as mutable social space and the less readily designated performance spaces of spoken word. However, despite the fact that as a working proposition the dissolution of relationships of distance and boundaries of exclusion between theatre and spoken word has strong precedents it does not communicate to the contemporary social and cultural landscape. Indeed, the two are viewed as discrete performance mediums. As I have argued critics such as Erika Fischer-Lichte propose radicalization of traditional theatre in an attempt to find new spaces which reconnect the theatre to the public life. This is certainly evidential in modern theatre practice. As the critic Gay McAuley enjoins, the deconstruction of the insularity of the theatre is achieved through recognition of the affective potential of the experience engendered by the bodily presence of the actors and spectators within the performance space. There is much to be argued for the relationship between a more modern notion of the theatre and spoken word performances, but it would be naive to argue that this relationship alone denatures

⁶⁹⁰ For further analysis of performance staging and the relationship between traditional notions of the theatre and contemporary performance philosophies, see: David Krasner, and David Z. Saltz, *Staging Philosophy: Intersections of Theatre, Performance, and Philosophy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

⁶⁹¹ Primavesi, p.178.

the distinct identifications of theatre and spoken word in cultural public perception. Indeed, to return to Daniel Johnson's essay 'Phenomenology, Time and Performance' (and to frame my interrogation of traditional theatre spaces) Johnson offers the caveat: 'The claim is certainly not that all theatre is necessarily phenomenological but has the potential to be so in so far as it focuses on a truthful engagement with the lived subject in the process of performance'.⁶⁹² Addressing distinctions between performance which achieves this potential and performance which does not relies on an understanding of how spaces are occupied differently within the performances. It also necessitates an examination of how both performers and audience engage within these spaces. The connotative relationship audiences share with spoken word and with theatre productions differ by preconditioned expectation. This is not only by dint of the position that theatre has occupied in the cultural consciousness but by the unique circumstances of the nascent re-emergence of spoken word into the same consciousness over the last few decades. These preconditioned expectations are of particular relevance to an analysis of the interaction between audience and performance within a performance space. This is particularly significant when considered through the lens of the performer, who must necessarily engage with their affective manifestations during the performance. In response to this element of my analysis I interviewed Zodwa Nyoni; a young writer and performer who has experienced working with both theatre and spoken word.

⁶⁹² Johnson, p.9.

Nyoni's writing experience is robust, both as a spoken word artist and as a published poet. Her page poetry has featured in numerous anthologies and journals including the *Crocus Books Love Anthology* (2013), *The Warehouse Magazine* (2009 and 2010), *Aesthetica Magazine: Creative Works Annual* (2009), *Sable Lit Magazine* (2009), and *Suitcase Book of Love Poems* (2008). However, Nyoni's primary engagement with poetry has been through spoken word. She has performed at the Venezuelan Embassy, the British Museum, the Ilkely Literature Festival, the Bridlington Literature Festival, the Southbank Centre, and the Nuyorican Poets Café in New York City – the latter being a site of near-pilgrimage for many Slam poetry enthusiasts. In 2005 Nyoni was selected to join the Leeds Young Authors Slam team competing in the Brave New Voices International Youth Poetry Festival held in New York. The Leeds Young Authors team were the first UK team that had been invited to the competition since its inception in 1998. Following on from her own experiences performing on the international Slam stage Nyoni worked as a poet coach with the 2009 Leeds Young Authors team, and her involvement was seminal to their success in the competition, where they placed second overall across all international participants. Recently Nyoni's work has moved towards the theatre. Having won the Channel 4 Playwrights Scheme and subsequently held a Writer-in-Residence position at the West Yorkshire Playhouse in 2014, her first full length play *Boi Boi is Dead* (2015) received high praise from reviewers and has prompted further interest in Nyoni's next theatre projects. Nyoni is an interesting study because of her outspoken perspective on spoken word and the UK Slam scene in particular. Despite her core involvement with the scene and its development since 2005 as a writer and performer she firmly places performance poetry in her past,

favouring theatre as her new preferred medium. This shift from spoken word to theatre is of particular interest when considering how performers negotiate the relationship between the two. When questioned about how her spoken word experiences differ from her experience in the theatre she responded:

Where is the line? Everyone is so caught up in defining. But I do it too - I cringe when people call me a poet. I'm no longer committed to poetry in the same way I'm committed to theatre. There's no way I'd say I'm a poet who writes theatre. No way, I'd be a fraud. There's no way I could do poetry shows anymore because my heart isn't in it, I don't connect to it the same way anymore.⁶⁹³

The difficulty of addressing the interrelationships of spoken word and performance is realized in Nyoni – an artist who has seemingly transitioned from one medium to the other. However, as Nyoni states, such a transition is problematized by the reluctance to define. Nyoni's own creative framework suggests an indissoluble sense of proximity regardless of designation, something recognized in reviews of Nyoni's more recent theatre. One *Guardian* reviewer commented on the poetry of Nyoni's scripted language: 'Like another playwright and poet, JM Synge, she grippingly connects a particular situation to the universals of shared experiences through a wonderfully rich, humorous and densely poetic use of language'.⁶⁹⁴ When

⁶⁹³ Zodwa Nyoni, interviewed by Jack McGowan, 11 September 2015.

⁶⁹⁴ Claire Brennan, 'Boi Boi Is Dead review – sprightly ease and emotional depth', *The Guardian Online*, 22 February 2015 <<http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/feb/22/boi-boi-is-dead-west-yorkshire-playhouse-review>> [accessed 15 September 2015].

pushed on the relationship between her theatre and her spoken word material

Nyoni offers:

Theatre is an extension of my attempts to carve out my voice as a writer. Parts of it will always be poetic. I don't want to leave my poetry, just do it differently. I don't want to do Slams anymore. But Boi Boi was a series of poems caught between dialogue and staging. The poetry is still there; I'm just learning to use it differently.⁶⁹⁵

Interrogating Nyoni on her self-imposed break from spoken word reveals a not unexpected, aversion to some of the elements that are commonly criticized in Slam.⁶⁹⁶ Although Nyoni does not devalue the affective potential of spoken word performances she indicates weariness towards the depersonalization of the performance space when it fails to manifest as honesty:

What is the function of spoken word and have we got caught up in the show of it all? For me, spoken word is for something I can't remove from myself, something I have to say personally. But the truth in your work will always have its own rhythms – in poetry I started manipulating that truth and had no investment. The organic feeling I lost in spoken word I found in theatre.⁶⁹⁷

⁶⁹⁵ Nyoni, interviewed by Jack McGowan.

⁶⁹⁶ One of the clearest of these elements is the critique of Slam's focus on the competition, articulated in: Zusha Elinson, 'Poetry Is Art, but Poetry Slams Are Sport, Bound by Pages of Rules', *The Wall Street Journal* (9 April 2016) <<http://www.wsj.com/articles/poetry-is-art-but-poetry-slams-are-sport-bound-by-pages-of-rules-1460045296>> [accessed 19 June 2016].

⁶⁹⁷ Nyoni, interviewed by Jack McGowan.

To examine this, what appears to be a negative analysis of performance poetry errs towards a more localized dissatisfaction with Slam and with the spoken word scene which glamorizes the performance as product at the cost of the 'organic feeling' of affective transaction. Nyoni readily admits that the manipulations of the truth in her poetry germinated as a response to an encroaching feeling of lost agency, something she not only explicitly anticipates but seems to accept as part of an involvement in any creative industry: 'When I've exhausted theatre I'll fall back in love with poetry'.⁶⁹⁸ During our discussion I countered that Slam exists as one (arguably, the) consumer-driven facet of contemporary spoken word, and that the grassroots development of a spoken word scene in the UK extends beyond this singular, problematized and divisive element. Although we agreed on this point, Nyoni's concern that the spoken word scene could not avoid developing in tandem with a less radical and more consumerist approach to performance remained apparent: 'Within any wave of change like spoken word is experiencing in the UK you have to contend with success and relevance'.⁶⁹⁹ For Nyoni the issues facing contemporary Slam are related to its restricted growth and development in the UK:

Slam in the UK is young. It will allow one person on the stage, whereas Slam in America - what's the word for a collection of poets? Groups of performance poets work together in the US, performing as troupes, writing together, getting booked together. The US has been doing spoken word since the 1980s, the UK has had less than a decade, maybe as little as five years. Slam's infrastructure in the US is huge, enough to

⁶⁹⁸ Nyoni, interviewed by Jack McGowan.

⁶⁹⁹ Nyoni, interviewed by Jack McGowan.

accommodate booking troupes of poets. The UK doesn't have that kind of infrastructure to support group work. It barely has the means to support individual poets who want to perform.⁷⁰⁰

This comparison between UK and US Slam scenes rings true when considered alongside previous elements of my analysis of the reception of spoken word in the UK. The lack of engagement with performance poetry in the academy corresponds to the lack of an infrastructure, critical or material. Inevitably with the absence of such an infrastructure the corollary de-emphasis of the medium's potential frustrates and hinders its development. Nyoni's observations regarding the limited space afforded to UK performance poets are of particular value considering her dual creative identity as both performance poet and playwright.⁷⁰¹ In describing the kinds of spaces occupied, and the way space is negotiated in both her poetry and her theatre she contends that space is used to address and to codify inclusions and exclusions: 'The primary function of my writing is to talk about the spaces we inhabit and the spaces we inhibit'.⁷⁰² The similarity of this as a methodology finds common ground in the heterotopia of the performance space which constantly resists and renegotiates identity.

Continuing my exploration of Nyoni's work our discussion moved towards the relationship Nyoni creates with her audience in both mediums, and the way this

⁷⁰⁰ Nyoni, interviewed by Jack McGowan.

⁷⁰¹ Resonances of this relationship between performance poetry spaces and theatre spaces in the context of Slam poetry in particular can be found in Jean Howard's essay 'Performance Art, Performance Poetry: The Two Sisters'. Jean Howard, 'Performance Art, Performance Poetry: The Two Sisters', in *Spoken Word Revolution: Slam, Hip-Hop, and the Poetry of a New Generation*, ed. by Mark Eleveld (Naperville: Sourcebooks Inc., 2003), pp.64-67.

⁷⁰² Nyoni, interviewed by Jack McGowan.

relationship can be analysed to pry apart the differences between the two. When asked whether there was a qualitative difference between the relationships derived from the audience-performer interaction in theatre and performance poetry Nyoni observed that:

It's always the rush of it. In the theatre my relationship with an audience is different. We're in a closed room together, it doesn't matter what our relationships are or might be, we're being sucked into a world. We all experience it until we get to the end. It's not the immediate one-on-one of poetry. With performance poetry you seek the stage because you want to share, and the audience will share it with you because the space is an immediate one. The space of the theatre is different. You share by collaboration, not just in the process with your actors and your producers and everyone else who helps put the production together. You collaborate with your audience, and it's a slower way to share the space because it's different, and it involves different processes.⁷⁰³

Nyoni's recognition of the collaborative engagement between performer and audience is a tacit appreciation of the transmissions of affect which constitute spoken word or theatrical performances. The temporal momentariness of the spoken word performance is of course critical in the context of the pace of the medium. Unlike the theatre, which Nyoni suggests is 'a slower way to share the space'⁷⁰⁴ the instantaneousness of the spoken word performance lends itself more

⁷⁰³ Nyoni, interviewed by Jack McGowan.

⁷⁰⁴ Nyoni, interviewed by Jack McGowan.

intensely to engaging with the moment of affect entrainment as it is experienced by the body. This focus on the moment of reception can be acknowledged in the spatial formation of the poetry performance, where everything is centred upon the performer with little in the way of competing stimulus:

Spoken word has a poet and a mic and less rules because of it. All a poet and a mic is asking you to do is to listen and connect with your own personal experiences. However far those experiences may take me as an audience member, when I think of how the space is configured all I'm left with is a poet and a mic. It's the simplicity of it.⁷⁰⁵

Isolating the distinctions between spoken word and theatre suggests that the differences can be centralized under a notion of transgression of, and resistance to, stimuli which might inhibit the clarity of the affect transaction. When one unpacks the idea of simplicity in this context there is an implicit value associated with the purer communication between performer and audience in spoken word. However, the correlative implication that theatre suffers from all the attached bells and whistles which may furnish the narrative or provide additional entertainment, but in reality get in the way of the experience, is short-sighted. Although the idea that performance poetry is a pure and simple distillation of the affective potential of poetry is an appealing one it is clearly more complicated. Theatre, especially modern theatre, must carry a great deal of tradition which is made manifest through the preconceptions which audience members hold when attending a

⁷⁰⁵ Nyoni, interviewed by Jack McGowan.

theatre performance. Although it may lack a comparative tradition, the poetry performance doesn't exist in a vacuum of pure, momentary affect either:

Whatever problem exists in the notion of sticking to traditional forms of theatre you have to look at Slam's traditions too, albeit a lot less firmly established. Slam traditionally grew out of the frustration of exclusion, so you go to working men's clubs to find people connected to the poetry and the way they see the world becomes a part of the tradition.⁷⁰⁶

What is of most pressing value in this postulation is the notion that the traditions of performance poetry are intimately linked to the spaces it traditionally inhabits. As I have suggested in my analysis, the occupation of heterotopic social spaces provides a platform for audiences to engage with performance poetry at the level of radical and enabling social discourse. The fact that the emerging traditions of performance poetry are intimately linked to the frustrations of inclusion and exclusion returns my analysis to the festival. In the context of spoken word development, the heterotopic festival is key. Of particular relevance to my examination are the theories of Henri Lefebvre and his principles regarding the processes by which spaces are produced within a society.

⁷⁰⁶ Nyoni, interviewed by Jack McGowan.

Lefebvre, representation, and festival

Henri Lefebvre's seminal 1974 text *The Production of Space*⁷⁰⁷ has received increased attention in response to the spatial turn and a re-examination of space and spatiality in critical thought.⁷⁰⁸ The density of Lefebvre's prose and his profoundly Marxist approach to questions of space and spatial production frustrate applications of his theories within the context of other spatial studies which may afford a more leisurely pairing with the issues provoked by a critique of the utilization of space in performance poetry. However, I contend that Lefebvre's usefulness lies in his specifically material focus, a materiality which sets him apart from other spatial theorists, and aligns his methodology with the French phenomenologists who strongly influenced his work (in particular Maurice Merleau-Ponty). Lefebvre's specific understanding of phenomenology differs slightly from other phenomenological interpretations due to the dominance of Marxism within his analysis.⁷⁰⁹ However Lefebvre views space itself as a material

⁷⁰⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

⁷⁰⁸ As the critic Christian Schmid notes: 'Lefebvre's theory of the production of space has undergone a remarkable renaissance during recent years. This is all the more surprising as it had hardly elicited any response when published in the early 1970s. Although Lefebvre's texts on Marxism, on everyday life, and on the city were widely read at the time, his reflections on space aroused little interest. The problematic of space did not as yet figure on the theoretical agenda. But today, Lefebvre's book *The Production of Space* is routinely quoted. The 'spatial turn' has taken hold of the social sciences and questions of space are accorded a great deal of attention, extending beyond geography'. Christian Schmid, 'Henri Lefebvre's Theory of The Production of Space; Towards a three-dimensional dialectic', in *Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henri Lefebvre*, ed. by Kanishk Goonewardena, Stefan Kipfer, Richard Milgrom, Christian Schmid (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp.27-46 (p.27).

⁷⁰⁹ For further information, see Stuart Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre: Theory and the Possible* (New York: Continuum, 2004): '[Lefebvre's] notion of everyday life has been usefully situated between the two principal movements of post-war French theory – existential phenomenology and structuralism. For Lefebvre, neither of these two approaches satisfactorily deals with everyday life... Instead, Lefebvre sees a notion of the lived as implicit in Marxism already' (Elden, p.113).

product, and crucially this production is, for Lefebvre, irreducible from its social origins. The difference underpins Schmid's critical interpretation of Lefebvre's work, and to an extent the misconceptions which frustrated his incorporation into the canon of spatiality in the decades after his publication:

(Social) space is a (social) product; in order to understand this fundamental thesis it is necessary, first of all, to break with the widespread understanding of space imagined as an independent material reality existing 'in itself'. Against such a view, Lefebvre, using concepts of the production of space, posits a theory that understands space as fundamentally bound up with social reality. It follows that space 'in itself' can never serve as an epistemological starting position. Space does not exist 'in itself'; it is produced.⁷¹⁰

In this context the social origins of spatial production are strongly suited to the medium of performance poetry which by virtue of its status as a spectacle of verbal art⁷¹¹ is profoundly linked to the social. The phenomenological experience of being an audience member is crucial to the operative mechanisms of spoken word performances, where affect is transmitted between bodies. When compared to a tradition of silent, solitary reading which abnegates the body's relationship with other bodies in the reading experience, the social elements of poetry on the stage

⁷¹⁰ Schmid, p.28.

⁷¹¹ 'Verbal art' in this context recalls Richard Bauman's definition in Richard Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance* (Rowley: Newbury House Publishers, 1977) which separates performance from folklore, impelling upon the former a dual sense of action (performance) and event (performance situation). This definition compliments my analysis of Lefebvre's engagement with space as it facilitates an understanding of performance as a simultaneous action as well as a spatially located event (Bauman, pp.3-5).

are clear and efficacious in a pedagogical context (exposed by the use of the body in performance). The use of the body as a monitor for interactions between performer and spectator implicitly underscores performance structures in the theatrical tradition of the spectacle. In discussing the relationship between theatrical composition and experience the Italian theorist and theatre director Eugenio Barba notes in his essay 'Words or Presence' that:

I believed that composition was the capacity of the actor to create signs, to consciously mould his own body into a deformation which was rich in suggestiveness and power of association: the body of the actor as a Rosetta stone and the spectator in the role of Champollion.⁷¹²

The rhetoric of this striking image; the spectator as discoverer and decoder of a cipher represented in the body of the performer, emphasises the vitality of the body on stage. Compared to a spoken word performance the theatre Barba speaks of may or may not be a more energetic, physical presentation, and the experiential prominence placed on the physicality of the body in action may have disproportionate relevance. However what Barba reveals in the description of this experience is the clear link drawn between the performance as process and a bodily engagement with space.⁷¹³ Although Barba is writing out of a critical field aligned

⁷¹² Eugenio Barba, 'Words or Presence', in *The Twentieth-Century Performance Reader 3rd Edition*, ed. by Teresa Brayshaw, Noel Witts (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), pp.46-53 (p.49).

⁷¹³ It is also important to note that Barba is careful to extend his critical perspective to the voice as an element of that bodily performance: 'We began to talk of vocal actions. That which for us has once been a postulate – the voice as a physiological process – now became a tangible reality which engaged the entire organism and projected it in space. The voice was a prolongation of the body which, through space, hit, touched, caressed, encircled, pushed, searched far away or close by; an invisible hand which stretched out from the body to act in space or renounce action. And even this renunciation was spoken by the invisible hand. But in order that the voice might act, it must know where the point was toward which it was directed, who that point was and why it was addressing him... The whole body of the actor resounded, the room resounded, as well as something inside me

with the theatre I posit that the links between the analysis of mechanisms of the body in theatre and in spoken word are distinct, supported by Barba's invocation of the voice within the compositional and performance processes. That Barba so profoundly remarks on the performer's projection into the performance space is a compelling reinforcement of Lefebvre's focus on the body, and of the importance of appropriating a critique of space in an analysis of the pedagogical implications of performance poetry. With this in mind, I argue that the under-representation of spatiality within critical thought exposes a correlative devaluation of the fundamental and powerful relationship with space which is inherent to performance poetry and its potential for educating the affective drives. In line with this position it is the body that is critical to Lefebvre's theories, centralizing his concept of the social as a relationship between bodies not simply as sites of matter but as generators of imagination, ideology, and affect:

Central to Lefebvre's materialist theory are human beings in their corporeality and sensuousness, with their sensitivity and imagination, their thinking and their ideologies; human beings who enter into relationships with each other through their activity and practice.⁷¹⁴

In order to explore the implications of the body and the relationship with performance poetry it is first necessary to analyse Lefebvre's theories of how space is produced. The production of space, while social in origin, stems from three

as I listened, provided the actor really addressed this point in space which, although invisible to my eyes, was concrete to him, perceptible to all his senses, present with physical features' (Barba, p.50).

⁷¹⁴ Schmid, p.29.

dialectically organized dimensions. This conceptual triad forms the centre of Lefebvre's critique. The triad is formed by the following:

- 1). Spatial practice: 'which embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation'.⁷¹⁵
- 2). Representations of space: 'which are tied to the relations of production and to the 'order' which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes, and to 'frontal' relations'.⁷¹⁶
- 3). Representational spaces: 'embodying complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life'.⁷¹⁷

To unpack each element in turn, spatial practice relates to the perception of spaces (of the individual and of the collective) which frames an everyday understanding of the world.⁷¹⁸ Spatial practices are thus necessary elements in the structural cohesion of everyday life. Their existence and continuation not only allows spaces to be established and set apart for different experiential practices (such as spaces for work and spaces for recreation) but also allows for relationships between practices within a space. In this respect, spatial practices delineate the material processes involved in social activity. This relies not on the individual practices themselves: the attendance of an audience at a spoken word venue, the

⁷¹⁵ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.33.

⁷¹⁶ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.33.

⁷¹⁷ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.33.

⁷¹⁸ In other words, spatial practices allow us to perceive and form an understanding of a society's structure: 'The spatial practice of a society secretes that society's space; it propounds and presupposes it, in a dialectical interaction; it produces it slowly and surely as it masters and appropriates it. From the analytical standpoint, the spatial practice of a society is revealed through the deciphering of its space' (Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.38).

performer's performance of a poem within that space - but an interrelationship between bisecting spatial practices: 'the system resulting from articulation and connection of elements or activities'.⁷¹⁹ The presence of these practices within the triad assures what Lefebvre refers to as competence and performance within a society:

Spatial practice ensures continuity and some degree of cohesion. In terms of social space, and of each member of a given society's relationship to that space, this cohesion implies a guaranteed level of competence and a specific level of performance.⁷²⁰

Representations of spaces are conceptualized spaces. This category intimately connects with Lefebvre's Marxism as the conceptualization of these spaces is, for Lefebvre, a construction delineated primarily by professionals such as planners, developers, or architects who are in the business of codifying spaces through signs and through objectified representation. Lefebvre refers to conceptualized space as 'the dominant space in any society (or mode of production)'⁷²¹ because it is intimately tied to a society's mode of production. Conceptualized space is present in Lefebvre's triad as it allows a society to form an image and thus a definition of a space. Representations of space are frequently linked to the graphic and linguistic designations of space, and thus how a society conceives and distinguishes separate spaces.

⁷¹⁹ Schmid, p.36.

⁷²⁰ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.33.

⁷²¹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, pp.38-39.

Finally, representational spaces are directly lived spaces; the spaces that one inhabits or uses. Lefebvre contends that: 'This is the dominated – and hence passively experienced – space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects'.⁷²² This can be distinguished from conceptualized space as it disavows designation, rather it exists as the space which provides the structures of imagery and symbolism that sustain its inhabitants through felt rather than thought experience. The relationship between representations of space and representational space – how one conceives of space and the actual space one lives in would seem to constitute a tenable dialectic in relation to social spaces. However, for Lefebvre, the triad is irreducible. The perceived space of spatial practice forms a vital element in the inter-relationship of the other two. As Andy Merrifield suggests in his critical examination of Lefebvre, 'Henri Lefebvre; A socialist in space':

Lefebvre is vague about the precise manner in which spatial practices mediate between the conceived and the lived, about how spatial practices keep representations of space and representational space together, yet apart. One thing he's more sure of, though, is that there are 'three elements' here not two. It's not, he says, about a simple binary between lived and conceived, but a 'triple determination': each instance internalizes and takes on meaning through other instances.⁷²³

⁷²² Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.39.

⁷²³ Andy Merrifield, 'Henri Lefebvre; A socialist in space', in *Thinking Space*, ed. by Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift (New York and Oxon: Routledge, 2000), pp.167-183 (p.175).

As a dialectical process, the relationships between the triad cannot be confronted without contradiction, however this is in itself fundamental to Lefebvre's theory of spatial production.⁷²⁴ To reconcile this process within the context of spatiality and the production of social space: space initially forms as a dimension established through the interconnected networks of spatial practice; social activities comprised of material experiences create relationships of and between these spatial practices. These interconnected networks of practices are conceptualized and subsequently codified and defined, becoming representations of space. Once codified, these representations can then be communicated, forming points of conceptual reference which enable communication to occur between them. This structure of communication allows users to conceive of space as an organizing principle, and once this organization is established it can be mapped onto actual inhabited space, meaning can form, and space becomes representational of social experiences and social norms.

The importance of Lefebvre's conceptual triad to the occupation of space in performance poetry goes further than the correlation between the three. As has been established, Lefebvre's influence on a study of performance spaces is implicitly tied to his investment in the body (materiality) and his critique extends the argument to the body through the networks formed by spatial practice (the basis of perception). Crucially, as I have argued, the merit of phenomenological

⁷²⁴ As Christian Schmid articulates: 'Lefebvre's triadic dialectic posits three terms. Each of these can be understood as a thesis and each one refers to the other two and would remain a mere abstraction without the others. This triadic figure does not end in a synthesis as in the Hegelian system. It links three moments that are left distinct from each other, without reconciling them in a synthesis – three moments that exist in interaction, in conflict, or in alliance with each other. Thus the three terms or moments assume equal importance, and each takes up a similar position in relation to the others' (Schmid, p.33).

experience necessitates an engagement of the material body within space.

Although Lefebvre dismisses certain aspects of phenomenology as a critical position (to accommodate his Marxist interpretation)⁷²⁵ Schmid's analysis of Lefebvre reinforces the essential relationship between body and space in his work:

Lefebvre's attitude towards the phenomenological version of perception is quite sceptical. Therefore, he combines with it the concept of spatial practice in order to show that perception not only takes place in the mind but is based on a concrete, produced materiality.⁷²⁶

The three elements which co-produce social space are all demonstrated by Lefebvre to be irreducibly linked to material, bodily processes:

In seeking to understand the three moments of social space, it may help to consider the body. All the more so inasmuch as the relationship to space of a 'subject' who is a member of a group or society implies his relationship to his own body and vice versa.⁷²⁷

Analysis of the three elements individually proves that a materially centred process is a rational approach to understanding spatial production. Firstly, perceived space (spatial practice) has an overtly material, sensory aspect. Social practice is evidently comprised of sensory experience. The networks established through distinct social activities are materially embodied: 'social practice presupposes the use of the

⁷²⁵ For a more in depth discussion of Lefebvre's Marxism see: Lukasz Stanek, *Henri Lefebvre on Space: Architecture, Urban Research, and the Production of Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

⁷²⁶ Schmid, pp.37-38.

⁷²⁷ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.40.

body... This is the realm of the perceived (the practical basis of the perception of the outside world, to put it in psychology's terms)^{.728} Secondly, conceived space (representations of space) is a phenomenological invocation of bodily experience through the appropriation of knowledge. One cannot conceptualize a whole from separate elements without an act of thought, and the basis of this thought comes from invoking a representation of the body: 'the body's relations with nature and with its surroundings or 'milieu''^{.729} Finally, lived space (representational space) is often misconstrued as immaterial due to the obscurities of cultural symbolism which pervades lived experience. Here Lefebvre cites Judaeo-Christian traditions of representation: 'The 'heart' as lived is strangely different from the heart as 'thought' and 'perceived''^{.730} However, for Lefebvre such illusory abstractions are merely interventions not reflections of the everyday occupation of lived space, which is situated in material, bodily experience:

This dimension denotes the world as it is experienced by human beings in the practice of their everyday life. On this point Lefebvre is unequivocal: the lived, practical experience does not let itself be exhausted through theoretical analysis.⁷³¹

This last point strongly reinforces the phenomenological methodology I have adopted. Lived experience is necessary to accurately interpret the world, just as lived, practical experience of poetry through the affective experience of a performance efficaciously informs and educates affective potential. The conclusions

⁷²⁸ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.40.

⁷²⁹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.40.

⁷³⁰ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.40.

⁷³¹ Schmid, p.40.

that can be reached from Lefebvre's insistence on the fundamentality of the material body reinforce the connection between spatial production and the affective processes enacted in the performance space. The performance of the poem has material presence (in the transformations of the body via affective transmission) and it is this material presence which produces the social space. This is grounded in Lefebvre's determined investment in the materialist basis of his critique:

The perceived-conceived-lived triad (in spatial terms: spatial practice, representations of space, representational space) loses all force if it is treated as an abstract 'model'. If it cannot grasp the concrete (as distinct from the 'immediate'), then its import is severely limited, amounting to no more than that of one ideological mediation among others.⁷³²

When considered logically, Lefebvre's insistence on the material, bodily aspects of his conceptual triad becomes an inherently rational element of his premise.⁷³³ However, as Merrifield offers in his critical analysis, Lefebvre's use of abstraction to denote the non-material is not simply a clear cut denuding of approaches which negate the body, rather it is a specific element of his Marxist critique: 'It ought to be pointed out here that Lefebvre's emphasis on 'abstract' has clear Marxian overtones: abstract space bears close resemblance to Marx's notion of abstract

⁷³² Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.40.

⁷³³ As Merrifield notes: 'Relations between the conceived-perceived-lived aren't ever stable and exhibit historically defined attributes and content. So it follows that Lefebvre's triad loses its political and analytical resonance if it gets treated merely in the abstract: it needs to be embodied with actual flesh and blood and culture, with real life relationships and events' (Merrifield, p.175).

labour'.⁷³⁴ The project undertaken in *The Production of Space*, and in Lefebvre's analytical position as a whole cannot be separated from his Marxist thought. Denying this Marxist element in Lefebvre's theory would frustrate any attempts to appropriate his analysis of social spaces and their production within a critique of performances spaces. To reconcile this with my methodological approach I contend that there is a direct relationship between Marxist models of production as articulated by Lefebvre and the affective transactions which take place within a spoken word performance. The conditions of Lefebvre's triadic production of social space are grounded by social processes. These processes are referred to as exchanges, which appear to be grounded by the association of capital, product, and value. However, exchange as a function of social relationship can be extrapolated beyond the application of material resource transaction. The exchange of product relies upon the correspondence of the body, and of bodily experience:

Exchange as the historical origin of the commodity society is not limited to the (physical) exchange of objects. It also requires communication, confrontation, comparison, and, therefore, language and discourse, signs and the exchange of signs, thus a mental exchange, so that a material exchange takes place at all.⁷³⁵

The necessary intervention of the body brings it to the forefront of the exchange encounter, thus re-situating the importance of bodily interaction at the heart of capital production and transaction. Further to this, the efficacy of Lefebvre's

⁷³⁴ Merrifield, p.175.

⁷³⁵ Schmid, p.40.

emphasis on exchange also extends to the invitation of affect into his theories regarding space and spatial production: 'The exchange of relationship also contains an affective aspect, an exchange of feeling and passions'.⁷³⁶ In the production of space (enabled by the triadic dialectic) affect and affective transmission is critical, and, critically, it is a transaction which can be securely located within a Marxist structure of analytical thought.

Although the imperative of materiality and of the body in Lefebvrian thought must not be overlooked it is of course important to recognize the implication of simply focusing on the body in the context of a spoken word performance. While affect primarily negotiates an audience's bodily response to the performance there is more at work in the performance space. Within a performance space the performance of the poem engages a material affective transaction, but the poem itself also carries a necessity for conceptual thought, examination, and understanding. Fundamental to a phenomenological approach to spatial production and to the interactions between individuals (spatial practices) which contribute to the structure of social spaces there is clearly an element of meaning creation. Material, bodily experience can be understood through a phenomenological encounter, facilitated by affect engaging practices such as the performance of a spoken word poem.⁷³⁷ The re-situation of the importance of the body in spatial

⁷³⁶ Schmid, p.40.

⁷³⁷ As Schmid articulates, Lefebvre draws together both a material understanding of spatial practice and a vector of thought which produces lived-experience: 'Lefebvre attempts consistently to maintain his dialectical materialist standpoint. In this way the epistemological perspective shifts from the subject that thinks, acts, and experiences to the process of social production of thought, action, and experience. When applied to the production of space this phenomenological approach leads to the following conclusion: a social space includes not only a concrete materiality but a thought concept and a feeling – an 'experience'. The materiality in itself or the material practice per se has no existence when viewed from a social perspective without the thought that directs and

theory is a necessary critical movement, however it does not presuppose that materiality exists without referent conceptual mechanisms. It is indeed prudent to reinforce that the triadic structure of Lefebvre's critique of the production of social spaces relies on each of the three elements and the interrelationship of these mechanisms:

The pure thought is pure fiction; it comes from the world, from Being, from material as well as from lived-experienced Being. And pure 'existence' is in the last analysis pure mysticism: it has no real – that is, social – existence without the materiality of the body on which it is based and without the thought that structures and expresses it. These three dimensions of the production of space constitute a contradictory dialectical unity. It is a threefold determination: space emerges only in the interplay of all three.⁷³⁸

This said, the project undertaken by Lefebvre (and other critics of the spatial turn) to reinforce the importance of materiality in a society, and in the production of that society's spaces must be accorded due significance. Although the body may be an equal-weighted element of the conceptual triad which underpinned Lefebvre's analysis, this was not representative of the attention awarded it in critical theories regarding space.⁷³⁹ The persistence of Lefebvre's thought thus becomes less a

represents them, and without the lived-experienced element, the feelings that are invested in this materiality' (Schmid, pp.40-41).

⁷³⁸ Schmid, p.41.

⁷³⁹ In the course of his analysis, Merrifield discusses Lefebvre's tacit self-awareness of this distinction: 'Lefebvre knows too well, for example, that the social space of lived experience gets crushed and vanquished by an abstract conceived space. In our society, in other words, what is lived and perceived is of secondary importance compared to what is conceived. And what is conceived is

process of simply confirming the triadic structure of his dialectic, and more an elucidation of his attempts to renegotiate the place of the body against the oppression of a societal perspective fixed on the abstract and the non-material. With this in mind, I propose that the performance space is the site par excellence to establish a re-evaluation of the processes involved in the production of social space, reinforcing the pedagogical potential of the performance. Not only is performance an effective medium for educating our affective drives, it is a valuable element of social space creation as it readdresses the dominance of a conceived understanding of everyday space through a foregrounding of affectively perceived and lived experience. Performance poetry generates social space whilst also enabling both an exploration of the conceptual aspects of the poetry and a lived, bodily experience. Though the silent reading of poetry on the page is undoubtedly an exemplar of socio-cultural discourse, the vitality of the performance of poetry adds an additional social function to the experience by heightening⁷⁴⁰ and facilitating the production of social space. This relationship between creative performance and efficacy in spatial production can be interpreted explicitly in Lefebvre's analysis of the festival.

The festival, which I have previously identified as a heterotopic site of idealized communal and social discourse, contrasts to the space of the everyday which carries its own set of habitual experiences. Lefebvre understood the dangers

usually an objective abstraction, an oppressive objective abstraction, which renders less significant both conscious and unconscious levels of lived experience' (Merrifield, p.175).

⁷⁴⁰ Here it is important to stress that the vitality of performance is precisely the mechanism required to emancipate the everyday: 'The world must be done in order to be experienced. The repetition of socially conditioned and located perceptions produce a world that can in turn be further transformed by acts of performance that address and disrupt the action of perception' (Bleeker, p.8).

inherent to the compartmentalization of human practices. In his preface to Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life*⁷⁴¹ (originally published in 1947) the critic Michel Trebitsch notes that Lefebvre undertakes to formulate a dialectic of experiential unity in response to the alienation of the everyday. Trebitsch states that in Lefebvrian terms: 'Alienation thus leads to the impoverishment, to the despoliation of everyday life'.⁷⁴² Unity for Lefebvre required a realignment of the individual, which, in the alienation of the modern everyday, erred towards one-sidedness: 'The devaluation of everyday life by ideologies appears as one-sided and partial, in both senses of the word'.⁷⁴³ In Merrifield's analysis of this argument he contends that:

Overcoming one-sidedness, for Lefebvre, means recovering a 'genuine humanism'... Implied herein is a more wholesome personhood and spatial organization. Crucial therein would be a reconciliation between thinking and living, between the head with the heart, between theory and practice, between what Lefebvre sees with what he wants. The reassertion of the spatialized body in critical thought is a first step towards this reconciliation.⁷⁴⁴

Processes of spatial production are, for Lefebvre, insistent upon interactivity, and this is an interactivity which negates the alienated individual. Lefebvre favours a necessary initial experience of hearing and the physicality of performed gestures over the isolation implicated in reading practices (the decoding of signs and

⁷⁴¹ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique Of Everyday Life* (London: Verso, 1991).

⁷⁴² Lefebvre, *Critique Of Everyday Life*, p.23.

⁷⁴³ Lefebvre, *Critique Of Everyday Life*, p.87.

⁷⁴⁴ Merrifield, p.177.

symbols associated not with the body but with a symbolic or grapholectic materiality).⁷⁴⁵

In Merrifield's critique he further extrapolates the basis Lefebvre laid out for the processes involved in dis-alienating the everyday. These are processes which centralize the body, affect, and crucially shared experience over private experience:

Lefebvre wants cities to release repression. He wants them to provide the means for 'free associative' expression... He wants everyday life and everyday space – urban representational space – to be reclaimed for itself, reclaimed as a decisive 'lived moment'. Lived moments somehow have to dis-alienate the everyday... indeed, they should be luminous 'festivals of the people'.⁷⁴⁶

As seen in Foucault's analysis of the festival as a heterotopic site permeated with potential for social transformation, Lefebvre sees the festival as the space of absolute social bonding. Although he notes the elements of excess and exuberance (which find easy analogues in the excess of affect commonly cited as a criticism of performance poetry) he accepts this as a necessary intensification of elements of the everyday life of individuals within a society:

Certainly, right from the start, festivals contrasted violently with everyday life, but they were not separate from it. They were like everyday life, but more intense; and the moments of that life - the

⁷⁴⁵ As Lefebvre argues: 'space does not consist in the projection of an intellectual representation, does not arise from the visible-readable realm, but that it is first of all heard (listened to) and enacted (through physical gestures and movements' (Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p.200).

⁷⁴⁶ Merrifield, p.179.

practical community, food, the relation with nature - in other words, work - were reunited, amplified, magnified in the festival. Man, still immersed in an immediate natural life, lived, mimed, sang, danced his relation with nature and the cosmic order as his elementary and confused thoughts 'represented' it... In his reality, he lived and achieved all his potential.⁷⁴⁷

When comparing Lefebvre's conception of the festival, resonances appear in the representation of the festival as holiday articulated by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger. In Lefebvre's Marxist impression of the festival I trace a connection to Heidegger which foregrounds my phenomenological methodology through an approach to the relationship between spatial occupation and everyday life. Just as Lefebvre posits a festival that contrasts with the alienating occupation of space in the everyday, as Daniel Johnson argues: 'Heidegger's phenomenology notes that we tend to overlook the structure of Being-in-the-world in everyday lives'.⁷⁴⁸ Heidegger believed that the everyday relegates our acknowledgment of phenomenological experience to an undifferentiated whole:

In phenomenological terms, temporality (in conjunction with historicity) is a fundamental condition for all Being. For Heidegger, there is nothing in our regular experience of the world that suggests that time is something present-at-hand.⁷⁴⁹

⁷⁴⁷ Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, p.207.

⁷⁴⁸ Johnson, p.5.

⁷⁴⁹ Johnson, p.6.

Johnson's interpretation is helpful as it locates my interpretation of performance comfortably within Heidegger's phenomenological position,⁷⁵⁰ particularly focusing on a defence of Being (the 'lived subject') in Heidegger's notion of art:

One might object that any human practice can be phenomenological in so far as aspects of 'Being' can be observed in it. But I believe that theatre in particular and art more generally occupies a special relationship to the investigation of Being. This thought is expressed in Heidegger's contemplation of the work of art as revealing of truth.⁷⁵¹

Heidegger and the festive space

Reading Heidegger through the lens of Julian Young's exploration entitled *Heidegger's Philosophy of Art*⁷⁵² a clear link can be established between Heidegger's position on art, and the importance of the space of the festival under a phenomenological enquiry. The festival offered a necessary space for sustaining presence and resisting destitution, a social destitution challenged by similar

⁷⁵⁰ This phenomenological position is not as clear cut as Johnson summarizes, but is accurate in the context of Heidegger's relationship with performance and art in general. For more detailed explanations of Heideggerian phenomenology see: Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems Of Phenomenology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); or Martin Heidegger, *Phenomenology of Intuition and Expression* (London: Continuum, 2010).

⁷⁵¹ Johnson, p.9.

⁷⁵² Julian Young, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

oppressions of the everyday characterized in the urban space of capital production. Young's discussion of a Heideggerian concept of the festival is grounded in the latter's appreciation of Friedrich Hölderlin: '[Heidegger] was possessed by a profound admiration for the early Romantic German poet Friedrich Hölderlin, an admiration that had begun during his student days and remained with him until his death'.⁷⁵³ Young charts a complicated debt Heidegger owes to Hölderlin as thinker, Hölderlin as poet, and Hölderlin as educator, but Heidegger himself acknowledged the debt clearly in a 1966 Interview with *Der Spiegel*, a German publication, the text of which was published after Heidegger's death:

My thinking stands in a definitive relationship to the poetry of Hölderlin.

I do not take Hölderlin to be just any poet whose work, among many others, has been taken as a subject by literary historians. For me Hölderlin is the poet who points to the future, who expects god and who therefore may not remain merely an object of Hölderlin research and of the kind of presentations offered by literary historians.⁷⁵⁴

The importance of this statement for an analysis of Heideggerian concepts of the festival lies in Heidegger's evaluation of Hölderlin as a poet who gestures towards the future. Complicit in this is a sense that Heidegger values Hölderlin's sense of social responsibility, and by extension the responsibility of art to the social and to

⁷⁵³ Young, p.69.

⁷⁵⁴ Manfred Stassen (ed.), *Martin Heidegger: Philosophical and Political Writings* (London and New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2006), p.43.

everyday life. For Heidegger, society faced threats from man's modern condition, a state of moral distress, and impelled a need to escape spiritual poverty.⁷⁵⁵

To understand Heidegger's resistance to Modernity's alienation Young proposes that Hölderlin's later texts posit a compass point for Heidegger's sense of a potential salvation: 'What however is different in the later texts is a new, and richer, way of describing the spiritual poverty of our age, a description couched in terms of our lack of what Hölderlin calls 'the festival''.⁷⁵⁶ The nexus between Hölderlin's presentation of the festival and Heidegger's conceptual development is Hölderlin's 1808 poem 'Remembrance'.⁷⁵⁷ In the poem Heidegger identifies Hölderlin's representation of an oneiric, memorialized space – the space of 'city's festivities' being 'heavy with golden dreams'.⁷⁵⁸ This space, the festival, is the site of Heidegger's desired meeting between Gods and men.⁷⁵⁹ Young denudes this in Heidegger's renunciation of the modern fixation with the space of work, and the space of material capital engagement:

What are festivals or holidays? In the first instance, says Heidegger, to 'celebrate the holiday (feiern)' means 'setting oneself outside everyday (alltäglich) activity, the cessation of work'. In the modern age this is all

⁷⁵⁵ Young proposes the following: 'Modernity, Heidegger quotes Hölderlin as saying, is the age of the 'flight of the gods' a time of 'spiritual decline'. 'The Gods', Heidegger- Hölderlin holds, are the indispensable foundation of authentic community. Only by dwelling 'in the sight of the gods' – in the visible and charismatic presence of the 'divine destinings', that is – can 'man... become historical, become, that is to say, a people'. Since individuals only find integration in community and meaning in commitment to communal 'destiny', modernity, as we have already seen, is the age of alienation and 'meaningless' (Young, pp.73-74).

⁷⁵⁶ Young, p.85.

⁷⁵⁷ Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hyperion and Selected Poems*, ed. by Eric L. Santer (London and New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2002), p.265.

⁷⁵⁸ Hölderlin, p.265.

⁷⁵⁹ Some of the roots of this relationship in Heideggerian thought can be examined further in Martin Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinking* (New York and Toronto: Harper & Row, 1975).

there is to the holiday. It has become a mere 'break from work (Arbeitspause)... This, however, completely fails to capture the proper and original essence of the holiday.'⁷⁶⁰

One may posit a division in this regard between a Lefebvrian frame: where the threat posed by the everyday necessitates a process of dis-alienation or a reconciliation with everydayness, and Heidegger's presentation of the festival as a space elevated out of the milieu of the everyday: 'To step into the festive mood... is, a fortiori, to step out of the 'everyday' since, by definition, the everyday is a matter of drab and 'wearisome' care'.⁷⁶¹ Heidegger distinguishes this rarefied space by drawing a comparison between essence and usefulness. In the former can be witnessed a connection to a spiritual mode of belonging in society (couched in Heidegger's apothegm of a 'meeting between men and Gods'). The latter 'usefulness' becomes for Heidegger an explicit association with value circumscribed and determined by production and utility:

The linking of 'everydayness', here, to 'the perspective of usefulness' is, surely, a preview of Heidegger's later characterization of modernity as the age of 'Gestell': the world-'enframing' epoch defined by the fact that, for most people, most of the time, the beings – including human beings – in whose midst we find ourselves, show up as, and only as, 'resource'.⁷⁶²

⁷⁶⁰ Young, pp.85-86.

⁷⁶¹ Young, p.86.

⁷⁶² Young, pp.86-87.

However, Heidegger's concept of 'Gestell'; the enframing of the world under precise, knowable categories of understanding or enclosed experience (a concept Heidegger intimately relates to the modern condition) does not necessarily imply a closed binary between the everyday and the festival. As Young notes:

Heidegger's anticipation of Gestell in the discussions of 'Remembrance' is important because it reveals it to be simply 'everydayness' raised to epoch-defining status, everydayness unmitigated by 'the festival'.⁷⁶³

Corresponding to a negotiation between the everyday and the festival space, and in preparation for the re-establishment of the potential of the performance poet in this reconciliation, tendencies to view the festival and the everyday as mutually exclusive may be mediated by accepting their mutuality. This mutuality centres around the manner in which the performance poem, through the festival space, may impel upon the everyday:

The authentic festival is, says Heidegger, a day for 'a coming to ourselves'; not in the sense of becoming self-obsessed or self-indulgent, but in the sense of a, as we say, 'coming to one's senses' or 'putting things into [their proper] perspective'. The authentic holiday is redemptive, as we say, 'time out', a stepping out of all usualness into the 'unusual' or better, the 'inhabitual'. It is not, however, a stepping into the exotic or 'sensational'. Rather, 'the opposite'.⁷⁶⁴

⁷⁶³ Young, p.87.

⁷⁶⁴ Young, p.87.

In the context of the performance poem, the condition of shared occupation of a festival space prepares audiences to receive a re-ordering (even a re-framing) of the everyday. This is the tacit implication of Heidegger's conception of the festival: 'On the authentic holiday, says Heidegger, we 'step into the... intimation of the wonder (Wunder) that around us a world worlds at all, that there is something rather than nothing, that there are things and we ourselves are in their midst, that we ourselves are'.⁷⁶⁵ Heidegger evinces not the experience of the new, or as Young suggests the 'exotic' but the familiar of the everyday revived in the context of the festival space. Crucially Heidegger writes not simply of 'essence' as the contrary of 'utility' in a problematic binary, but of coming to view this essence through a new experiential mode: 'What has to be remembered, however, is that in the festive mode (mood) we stand not just in the 'essence' of things but also in the 'wonder' of the world's worlding'.⁷⁶⁶

Heidegger refers to this new experience as a re-representation of the world around us: the festive mood (the correlative of occupying the festive space) imbues the world with a 'gleam' (Glanz).⁷⁶⁷ For Heidegger the potency of this 'gleam' is that it elucidates a sacred order: the essentiality of the 'essence' contained within the festive. Here Heidegger explicitly refers to dance and theatre as central elements in the institution of the essential light of the festival, but predicates their relevance in

⁷⁶⁵ Young, p.86.

⁷⁶⁶ Young, p.88.

⁷⁶⁷ For a more detailed presentation of Heidegger's 'Glanz', see: Richard Capobianco, *Heidegger's Way of Being* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014): 'For the later Heidegger especially, the gleaming, glistening, glimmering, glittering, glowing that is the manifestness of Being to humans... calls forth from us wonder and astonishment and great joy; brightens, lightens, and opens us; inclines our thinking towards thanking; and humbles us into recognizing the limit of all our saying, language, meaning' (Capobianco, p.37).

relation to their: 'being bound into the hidden obedience and rule of beings'.⁷⁶⁸

What one can infer from this is the prominence of the role art plays in this re-representation. This is not raw affective response, but a conditioned display of affect permitted by the festive space. In this respect, when the performance poem is conditioned as art by the dimensions of the stage (alive to the reordering of shared affective experience in a communal occupation of space) it becomes the exemplar of Heidegger's notion of the festival. What is uniquely recognized in the performance of poetry is the shared affective experience. This is the communal experience over the individual reading, a necessary element of the Heideggerian festival where one recognizes: 'the essential character of any festival – the gathering together of community within that 'wonder' that happens in the work (the 'communal' condition)'.⁷⁶⁹ In the context of a phenomenological experience the necessary implication of such wonder is a lived experience. Daniel Johnson's critique of phenomenology, time, and performance poses that Heideggerian phenomenology engages with the possibility of 'uncovering the transcendental structures of Being and answering the question: what is necessary for there to be Being at all?'.⁷⁷⁰ Once again his suggestions regarding how to investigate the question are located in practice, through performance.

The relevance of such phenomenological enquiry to the spatial negotiation enacted by performance poetry is that it enables a clearer conception of the role of the performer within the festival space. The 'essence' of the festive space is

⁷⁶⁸ Young, p.88.

⁷⁶⁹ Young, p.89.

⁷⁷⁰ Johnson, p.3.

acknowledged not simply as the being of the festival detached from the everyday but the balance of an outward display of affect defined through the conditions of the performance. This balance can be recognized in Heidegger's theory of art, which is delineated by the paradigm of ancient Greek Art. Clear parallels can be drawn between a Hegelian determination of 'the death of art' and Heidegger's belief that the modern age had been artless; that not since ancient Greece, or the later Middle Ages had art been 'great art'. Although Hegel believed in an irreconcilable distance between great art and the modern state of being; that great art must necessarily remain something in the past⁷⁷¹, on this point Heidegger disagreed: 'The truth of Hegel's judgement has not yet been decided; for behind this verdict there stands Western thought since the Greeks'.⁷⁷² Heidegger's belief in potential salvation: 'the possibility of the rebirth of art'⁷⁷³ is notably a rebirth not a return. Invoking the notion of balance, Heidegger underscored the problems of a reiteration of ancient Greek art by recalling Nietzsche's distinction between the Apollonian and the Dionysian in Nietzsche's 1872 text *The Birth Of Tragedy*⁷⁷⁴, though in the language of the dichotomy Heidegger adopts a perspective closer to Hölderlin's poetics.⁷⁷⁵

⁷⁷¹ For further information, see: G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art: Volume 1*, trans. by T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

⁷⁷² Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p.78.

⁷⁷³ Young, p.15.

⁷⁷⁴ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Birth Of Tragedy Out Of The Spirit Of Music* (London: Penguin, 1993).

⁷⁷⁵ Young summarizes the theory quite clearly, positing that: 'The archaic Greeks, said Heidegger, lacked, in a certain way, balance. Though endowed with a powerful openness to the 'fire', they were weak in their capacity for 'clarity of presentation'. The result was that though their 'fitting destiny' was indeed already 'assigned to them', it appeared to them only in a 'veiled and equivocal manner'. In the language of 'The Origin', what the archaic Greeks could not do was 'open up' their world, bring its 'simple and essential' features out of background inconspicuousness and into foreground salience' (Young, p.96).

To contextualize this argument, I posit that the condition of a raw, Dionysian 'fire' might manifest itself as unmediated affect. However, to re-determine balance 'clarity of presentation' necessitates, rather than an aleatory degree of affective transmissions, the presence of a locus within the festive space; the performance. To return to Heidegger's condition of art and the theatrical in the festive space: 'being bound into the hidden obedience and rule of beings'⁷⁷⁶ one is impelled to understand art through the lens of this balance. Certainly, as Young notes, Heidegger's representation of the modern state of art errs towards delimitation characterized in an Apollonian enframing (Gestell) of division, codification, and structure. In Young's subsequent deconstruction of a Heideggerian understanding of art and the modern man he suggests:

We, however, are out of balance in precisely the opposite way to the archaic Greeks and so our 'task' is exactly the reverse of theirs... We find ourselves pre-eminently endowed with 'the ability to grasp and delimit', to bring the veiled and confusing to the clarity of conceptual articulation... So alienated from the holy 'fire' have we become that we possess no measure of, or limit upon, what to do with our power.⁷⁷⁷

One could posit that evoking balance through the language of 'clarity' diametrically opposed to 'fire' appears as a neat analogue for the division between page poetry and performance poetry, where affect becomes the factor mediating the opposition. Young's description of the essential negotiation: 'Our task, then, the

⁷⁷⁶ Young, p.88.

⁷⁷⁷ Young, p.97.

opposite of the Greeks', is to recover the "fire"⁷⁷⁸ compels us to embrace the affective potential of poetry, a potential made explicitly manifest in performance. But for Heidegger this is a poetry which is grounded, a recovery of art without a sacrifice of structure, a meeting of Apollonian and Dionysian frames, or as Heidegger suggests in his lecture 'Hölderlin's Hymn 'The Ister'', a poetry that allows us to: 'grasp the ungraspable'.⁷⁷⁹ More saliently perhaps, is Heidegger's consequent description of this process as enabling self-knowledge through the clarity of presentation in the formation of frameworks (the Apollonian) but a self-knowledge alive to the unknown, the unknowable (Dionysian), or as Heidegger states: 'grasping [our]selves in the face of what is ungraspable'.⁷⁸⁰ To elucidate, as Young argues, the role poetry plays for Heidegger in the process of modern man's salvation is the balance between engaging the affect (the spirit, or the holy) and bringing to it not the world enframing of 'Gestell', but a reference for preservation and communication (my emphasis):

In other language, poetry which 'founds the holy', which validates itself in terms not of the 'Greek' but rather, as I shall call it, the 'modern paradigm', is poetry which *preserves and communicates* 'the Dionysian'.⁷⁸¹

For the performance poet, affect unmediated does not become poetry, and here it is vital that the act of the performance is contextualized first within the poem space

⁷⁷⁸ Young, p.97.

⁷⁷⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn 'The Ister'* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), p.136.

⁷⁸⁰ Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn 'The Ister'*, p.136.

⁷⁸¹ Young, p.99.

(the conditions of the poem) and then the performance space (the festive or social space where the performance is enacted). For a Heideggerian interpretation of art within a space, particularly the festive space, it is important to briefly reference the concept of 'the Open', which Heidegger understood as a condition of man. Being within the world (*dasein*) is being open to the world, so one should understand the world as being open: 'By the opening up of a world, all things gain their lingering and hastening, their remoteness and nearness, their scope and limits'.⁷⁸²

Heidegger's statements in *Poetry, Language, Thought* on poetry, and the role of poetics in particular assert this connection:

Poetry, however, is not an aimless imagining of whimsicalities and not a flight of mere notions and fancies into the realm of the unreal. What poetry, as illuminating projection, unfolds of unconcealedness and projects ahead into the design of the figure, is the Open which poetry lets happen, and indeed in such a way that only now, in the midst of beings, the Open brings beings to shine and ring out.⁷⁸³

For Heidegger the opening of the world is inculcated in both the poetic and the spatial: 'A work, by being a work, makes space for that spaciousness. 'To make space for' means here especially to liberate the Open and to establish it in its structure... The work as work sets up a world. The work holds open the Open of the world'.⁷⁸⁴ In the affective potential of the performance as art, the world is made

⁷⁸² Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p.44.

⁷⁸³ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p.70.

⁷⁸⁴ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p.44.

manifest. Yet the Open is held open by spatial framing, and by the necessary correlative inquiry that comes with such a structure:

We inquire into the nature of art... Such reflection cannot force art and its coming-to-be. But this reflective knowledge is the preliminary and therefore indispensable preparation for the becoming of art. Only such knowledge prepares its space for art, their way for the creators, their location for the preservers.⁷⁸⁵

Space therefore is essential to the potential of affect, and the opening of the world inculcated in art. Further to this I posit that the relationship Heidegger advocates between language and the Open is uniquely suited to an argument for performance poetry. Heidegger's concept of language borders upon a discussion of affect, whereby the role of language as a device for communication is interrogated:

But language is not only and not primarily an audible and written expression of what is to be communicated. It not only puts forth in words and statements what is overtly or covertly intended to be communicated; language alone brings what is, as something that is, into the Open for the first time.⁷⁸⁶

Heidegger discusses language's function as a naming of beings; and only through this naming can beings come 'to their being *from out of* their being'.⁷⁸⁷ The projection of what is brings an elucidation of its being: 'This projective

⁷⁸⁵ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p.75.

⁷⁸⁶ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p.71.

⁷⁸⁷ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p.71.

announcement forthwith becomes a renunciation of all the dim confusion in which what is veils and withdrawn itself'.⁷⁸⁸ In this context, one could argue that the projective announcement becomes the recognized receipt of affect, or rather the identification of a being's affective potential. This certainly rings true in Heidegger's elaboration of the 'projective saying': 'Projective saying is poetry: the saying of world and earth... Poetry is the saying of the unconcealment of what is'.⁷⁸⁹ I believe that a clear correlative can be drawn between the affect of the poem and the unconcealing of what is. To recall the influence of the festive (or performance) space here, Heidegger argues: 'a work is in actual effect as a work only when we remove ourselves from our commonplace routine and move into what is disclosed by the work, so as to bring our own nature itself to take a stand in the truth of what is'.⁷⁹⁰ In essence the disclosure of the work (its affective potential) can be brought into one's own nature (affective reception). This is made overt when one sanctions the commonplace routine⁷⁹¹ in favour of the interruption that is presented by the festive space.

Through Lefebvre, Foucault, and Heidegger I posit that there is ample ground to form a correlation of function between the type of festival which Lefebvre and Heidegger espouse and the contemporary performance poetry space. There is a tacit connection formed when one considers the parallelism of the spaces under a Foucauldian representation of heterotopias. Lefebvre notes that the traditional

⁷⁸⁸ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p.71.

⁷⁸⁹ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p.71.

⁷⁹⁰ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p.72.

⁷⁹¹ Understood both in the sense of a commonplace understanding of language as signification absent affect and the routine of the commonplace or everyday space.

festival was a site not simply of excess but of reaffirmation of social bonds.⁷⁹² This representation of social space bears a keen resemblance to Foucault's propositions regarding the public use of heterotopic space and the importance of the educative impact of such transformative spaces on the social structures which occupy them. In the performance poetry space affective excess is experienced not only collectively, but contributively, through the various networks of affect transmitted by each individual body, to a collective body of audience members and performers. This exchange of affect within a performance space takes on great energetic and pedagogic potential. For both spectators and practitioners this potential is then directed outwards, outside of the performance space, to the possibilities inherent in potential transformations through the occupations of space in everyday life. The function of a performance space as a generator of potential is unequivocally reflected in Foucault's sixth principle of heterotopias: 'The last trait of heterotopias is that they have a function in relation to all the space that remains'.⁷⁹³ To quote Lefebvre: 'Festival differed from everyday life only in the explosion of forces which had been slowly accumulated in and via everyday life itself'.⁷⁹⁴ The functional role of the performance space is imperatively tied to the social necessity of the affective bodily experience, the same experience which so amply facilitates the production of further social spaces. There is a clear resemblance which the performance poetry

⁷⁹² Lefebvre discusses the traditional festival as 'peasant celebration', once again affirming the importance of class and material social structures within his thought: 'Peasant celebrations tightened social links and at the same time gave rein to all the desires which had been pent up by collective discipline and the necessities of everyday work. In celebrating, each member of the community went beyond himself, so to speak, and in one fell swoop drew all that was energetic, pleasurable and possible from nature, food, social life and his own body and mind' (Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, p.202).

⁷⁹³ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p.27.

⁷⁹⁴ Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, p.202.

event bears to the festival in terms of its acceptance of affective excess and its occupation of a similar transitional space between both institution (the performance as an event) and the everyday (the negotiation of the audience as active participants in the occupation of the social space).

Recalling Erica Fischer-Lichte's critique of performance and spatiality, the festival is established as critical to the cultural health and advancement of a community: 'festivals appear to be the genre of cultural performance most capable of leading to the formation of new communities or the reinforcement of existing ones'.⁷⁹⁵ The strengthening of the connection between the performance space and the festival space relies upon an understanding of their mutual and vital capacity for production; the production of social space and, implicitly, community. This conception of the performance space identifies it as an exemplary heterotopia; one which frames the everyday of the social space, and which enables a transgression of the fixed, utopic space. In this manner, the performance space comes to resemble the festival space, which is delineated by the festive action: 'the quintessence of a festive action consists in the transgression of certain rules, namely those that impose constraints on daily life'.⁷⁹⁶ The performance of poetry provides both affective transmission, and through this bodily transaction, the means to establish, foster, and empower social structures. These processes resemble what Fischer-Lichte refers to in her analysis of policies of spatial appropriation as 'strategies that transformed space into festival space, in which the participants felt and acted like

⁷⁹⁵ Fischer-Lichte, p.235.

⁷⁹⁶ Fischer-Lichte, p.235.

members of a community'.⁷⁹⁷ This aspect of communality which sits at the very heart of the experience of performance poetry is fundamental to the recession of alienation in everyday life which permeates through non-occupation of social spaces. Through the shared experience of poetry, culturally and socially determined as a radically heightened discursive mode, the affectively charged interaction gathers even greater potential. This potential allows sites of performance to be cultivated as spaces of significance outside of the everyday occupation of space (such as the experience of private reading) which carries the constant threat of potential alienation.

⁷⁹⁷ Fischer-Lichte, p.235.

Conclusion

Examining the pedagogy of performance poetry in the context of affective and spatial enquiries elucidates the value of the medium for contemporary poetics. The development of performance poetry in the UK (as distinct from established US scenes which connect in more tangible ways with the US academy) presents an optimal site for attention to frameworks of pedagogy which could take advantage of the radical, exciting, emerging UK spoken word scene.⁷⁹⁸ However, this is not to obfuscate the fact that there still may be issues that frustrate this pedagogy in practice, and it is these issues I address in the conclusion of my investigation. Despite arguments for increased attention to spoken word levied by contemporary UK poets such as Lemn Sissay, James Fenton, and Simon Armitage, the page represents a seemingly inevitable future for performance poets.⁷⁹⁹ Significant spoken word organizations in the UK such as Apples & Snakes still reach for print publication as a means of buttressing performance poetry produced by their

⁷⁹⁸ In a March 2016 article entitled 'Why Does London Dominate The UK Poetry Scene?' Kyra Hanson suggests that the answer to her own question is firmly and profoundly linked to the increased popularity of spoken word and the increased opportunities to experience performance poetry in London specifically. Kyra Hanson, 'Why Does London Dominate The UK Poetry Scene?', *Londonist*, 03 March 2016 <<http://londonist.com/2016/01/london-dominates-the-uk-hammer-and-tongue-national-poetry-slam>> [accessed 09 August 2016].

⁷⁹⁹ For further discussion of this see Susan B. Somers-Willett's *The Cultural Politics of Slam Poetry*, particularly chapter four: "'Commercial Niggas Like Me': Spoken Word Poetry, Hip-Hop, and the Racial Politics of Going Mainstream' (Somers-Willett, pp.96-133) where Somers-Willett describes the propensity of spoken word artists to use their success on the stage as a springboard for launching more conventional print careers.

affiliated artists.⁸⁰⁰ This desire to subscribe to the page relates to issues of permanency, as Don Cusic argues in his text *The Poet as Performer*:

The poet / performer is subject to a dichotomy in the world of poetry.

The performances provide an income, an audience response to poetry, and a chance to take poetry to the public and achieve some popularity.

On one hand the poet/performer must contend with critics who tend to evaluate poetry solely by the written word. On the other hand, it is the literature that is immortal. The poet dies, the poem lives on; the performance vanishes, the book remains.⁸⁰¹

The perpetuity of the page poem versus the temporality of the performance poem is an issue which I have touched on in the course of my analysis of the lingering affective quality of a performance. Certainly the artefact of the book contrasts the live nature of a performance, however with the advent of online video hosting sites such as YouTube, Vimeo, and Vine the permanence of the performance poem may be reconsidered. The way in which contemporary spoken word is predominantly accessed and consumed has been profoundly influenced by the proliferation of spoken word videos available to watch online. Analysis of spoken word performances benefit from this evidence of the performance in the form of recordings, and sites such as YouTube provide a platform for certain pedagogical enquires. This being said, the focus of my research has highlighted the affective and spatial qualities of performance poetry, elements which are contingent upon live

⁸⁰⁰ For instance, see: Maja Prausnitz, Gretchen Ladish, and Geraldine Collinge (eds.), *Velocity: The Best of Apples & Snakes* (London: Black Spring Press, 2003).

⁸⁰¹ Cusic, p.107.

performance, where the evidence of the poem is configured not as text or recorded media but as a trace left upon the body.⁸⁰²

As I have argued throughout my thesis, the strength of the relationship between poem and page (and the cultural cachet that this relationship carries) need not be obstructive; space must simply be opened to consider UK spoken word alongside text-based modes of reception.⁸⁰³ To do so, I suggest a recalibration must occur surrounding certain audience preconceptions of the potential of affect and the use of social spaces as argued in my previous chapters. On a practical level also, preconceptions exist regarding the nature of the poet as performer. Though dated, Francis Berry's 1962 *Poetry and the Physical Voice* articulates an enduring resistance to the idea of separating the performance from the individual voice.⁸⁰⁴ The opening interrogative lines of Berry's text firmly establishes the nature of his enquiry:

What vocal sound does a reader hear, with his inner ear, when he
silently peruses a poem or passage of poetry? If what he hears
corresponds with the actual physical voice of the poet, how does the

⁸⁰² While spatial and affective relationships to a particular performance do in essence necessitate a physical, bodily presence in the performance space, there are clearly arguments to be made suggesting that online videos can still produce bodily responses in their recipients. This removes the transactional relationship between poet and audience, but it does offer the potential for videos of spoken word to produce feelings which can contribute to the education of affective drives. A contemporary example of this would be the recent vogue for 'ASMR' videos (Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response) which attempt to stimulate certain bodily responses from their viewers by performing 'triggers' such as tapping noises, soft speaking, or using props to simulate certain physical sensations. For more information on this phenomenon, see: Nick Highman, 'ASMR: The videos which claim to make their viewers 'tingle'', *BBC News Online*, 11 December 2014 <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-30412358>> [accessed 29 July 2016].

⁸⁰³ This space is certainly being opened globally by critical examinations such as: Julia Novak, *Live Poetry: An Integrated Approach to Poetry in Performance* (New York and Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), and Cornelia Graebner, *Performing Poetry: Body, Place and Rhythm in the Poetry Performance* (New York and Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011).

⁸⁰⁴ Francis Berry, *Poetry and the Physical Voice* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962).

poet create this awareness of his personal voice in the mind of the reader, a voice which the reader must – presumably – imitate, or attempt to imitate, when he renders the poem, or the passages of poetry, aloud?⁸⁰⁵

Berry proceeds to analyse the voices of a series of famous dead white male poets in an attempt to capture what made their voices distinct.⁸⁰⁶ Although, as I have argued at length, I believe that the body (and by extension the physical voice) of the performer is crucial to the engagement of performance poetics I see dangers in a sort of rhetoric which seeks to ascribe the value or the affective potential of spoken word performance to individuals of certain skill, integrity, or value. No doubt this plays a part in what constitutes the affective experience of the performance, but to follow the lines of Berry's argument is to invite the kind of elitism which hallmarks certain strands of academic association with poetics, as previously discussed. In clearer terms, the notion Berry seems to be articulating in the safe context of a particular literary canon is that certain writers escape the complications of being placed on a pedestal (these are the voices one 'should' try to emulate). Whereas this seems to be the status quo of text based hermeneutics and canon building, it becomes an odious manifestation of celebrity-culture in the context of the spoken word performer.⁸⁰⁷ A dichotomy of this kind fails to acknowledge the potential of

⁸⁰⁵ Berry, p.3.

⁸⁰⁶ Namely: Tennyson, Shelley, Milton, Shakespeare, Marlowe, and a small concessionary chapter entitled 'Some Recent Voices' (Berry, pp.177-189) which predictably discusses W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot, W.H. Auden, and no women or poets of colour at all.

⁸⁰⁷ Don Cusic addresses this very issue in the conclusion to his text *The Poet as Performer*: 'The concept of celebrity is another red flag for those in English departments and others in the literary world in regards to poets and poetry. There seems to be an underlying belief that whatever is popular is crass, whatever is commercially successful is aesthetically suspect. Therefore, the notion

spoken word by forestalling enquiry into it out of a suspicion of its popular appeal.⁸⁰⁸

This sort of rhetoric need only receive a simple response. Fear of the popular, celebrity performance poet damaging the quality of UK poetics with irreverent showmanship and shallow verse does not engage with the fact that performance poetry is not just beneficial in an affective or a socio-spatial sense, it may also benefit the quality of the poet's writing. In my examination of I. A. Richards' practical approach to the business of poetry criticism this kind of value was alluded to, but I further contend that the performance of a poem is a continuation of its composition. The critic Donald Hall articulates a complex and not entirely favourable relationship with spoken word in his essay 'The Poetry Reading: Public Performance / Private Art'.⁸⁰⁹ However he does not maintain a consistent criticism of the poetry reading or performance in his essay, also noting that:

of a poet seeking any kind of celebrity-status causes many to shudder. Yet it is the reputations of people that often determines our interest in them and their work' (Cusic, p.107).

⁸⁰⁸ This sort of argumentation common, evidenced by critical enquiries such as Roberta Berke's *Bounds Out of Bounds*, where Berke argues that: 'far too many poets are tempted by the need to entertain an audience... readings often degenerate into cabaret, with the poet just another "personality on parade"' (Berke, p.66).

⁸⁰⁹ Hall comments on the value of the private reading as a moment of contemplation: 'The poetry reading deprives us of civilization's inwardness. Obviously any performance deprives us of the opportunity to supply our own sound and gesture. Performance makes passivity... Poet and reader, alone together, find an intimacy that crowds inhibit or prevent. The private art-poet in solitude finding and shaping the only word, carving it like alabaster; not poet as gregarious talker improvising the moment's eloquence – finds in silent reading its appropriate publication: its public is a series of intense privacies'. Donald Hall, 'The Poetry Reading: Public Performance / Private Art', in *American Scholar*, Volume 54. Issue 1 (1984-85), pp.63-77 (p.72). There is of course an argument to be made for the moment of the private reading, but here Hall is falling into the trap of producing exclusive binaries between page and stage poetry instead of producing space for both.

While the reading can encourage bad habits, it can also lead to revision.

It holds poets to the record of past work. Reading old things aloud,
perforce one becomes scholar of old errors.⁸¹⁰

Hall ultimately cannot square his criticism of spoken word with the profoundly affective, social elements of the poetry performance: 'In the poetry reading the relationship between poet and audience is clear and instantaneous... Present community can become palpable in the poetry reading'.⁸¹¹ This community benefits the poet by offering a sounding board for their composition: 'at the best moments, like great theatre when actor and audience merge, the poet, saying lines laboured over in solitude, reads them returning on the faces of the audience'.⁸¹² This is an argument which Don Cusic reinforces:

the greatest benefit public readings hold for a poet is that it provides a forum for the poetry which lets the poet know immediately what works and what doesn't. It is hard to imagine an audience when you write alone; performing poetry puts the audience in the same room. Perhaps this is the major advantage of being a poet/performer.⁸¹³

Such a perspective supports the pedagogical potential of performance poetry which I have presented. It engages with the multi-directional capacities of affect transmission, while also recognizing that the performance itself can encourage re-evaluation of the quality of a poem. In a 1976 edition of *American Scholar* the

⁸¹⁰ Hall, p.75.

⁸¹¹ Hall, p.77.

⁸¹² Hall, p.77.

⁸¹³ Cusic, p.9.

literary critic Samuel Hazo published an essay addressing the relationship between poetry and the public which posited three points in defence of performance poetics:

There are more reasons for encouraging the revitalization of the oral or bardic tradition than for remaining indifferent or opposed to it. First, it seems by definition essential to the appreciation of the poem – and this holds true whether the reciter of the poem is the poet himself or another person. Second, it is beneficial to poets simply to hear themselves say their poems; frequently their ears detect flaws that their eyes missed. Third, poetry readings quite literally create audiences that would not otherwise exist and, in so doing, make the appreciation of poetry an active rather than a passive activity – that is, listeners must make a conscious effort to respond, to participate by their very attention to what they are hearing.⁸¹⁴

Hazo's second point affirms the dynamic value of performing poetry for the poet and his third point acknowledges the value of creating an audience for poetry. As I have argued the return to a halcyon ideal of oral poetics is attenuated by the complications of a post-literate cultural community. However, a reconnection with the core virtues of orality (its affective and socio-spatial elements) could do great

⁸¹⁴ Samuel Hazo, 'Poetry and the American Public', in *American Scholar*, Volume 45. Issue 2 (1976), pp.278-290 (p.290).

things for the contemporary poetic landscape.⁸¹⁵ Ultimately, as the critic Don Cusic avers, the poet as a performer is critical to the future of contemporary poetics:

The poet who is a performer makes poetry significant beyond the walls of academe and reaches an audience with an interest in poetry but without a lifelong passion (or occupation) with it. In many ways, the poet/performer is the layer between the poet and the public and, though many would argue that widespread public acceptance and consumption would denigrate poetry, the simple fact remains poetry needs a public.⁸¹⁶

Although the idea of making poetry 'significant' beyond traditional, conventional audiences is doubtless more complex than Cusic proposes, there is an unassuming virtue to Cusic's idea of the performer and their relationship with the public which cannot be overlooked. Despite the problems encountered when spoken word is brought into contemporary UK poetics, the fact indeed remains that poetry does need a public, and performance poetry presents itself as an apt medium which not only brings public and poetry together, but enlivens, enriches, and educates.

⁸¹⁵ The shift from oral to literary receipt of poetry is captured quite succinctly in Jacob Drachler and Virginia R. Terris's 1969 text *The Many Worlds of Poetry*: 'Not until the eighteenth century did books become a major vehicle for the communication of poetry... Then, in the era of the book and magazine, the art of poetry underwent a highly conscious literary development – not all of it good, of course. But at its best, poetry never lost its closeness to the breath, the voice, the ear – to the nature of singing speech'. Jacob Drachler, and Virginia R. Terris, *The Many Worlds of Poetry* (New York: Knopf, 1969), p.241.

⁸¹⁶ Cusic, p.109

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